

# This Old House

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buyer's  
guide

**100  
easy  
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P. 100

add curb  
appeal  
from every  
angle  
P. 94

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OCTOBER 2009

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**P. 100**  
100 DIY UPGRADES  
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Cover Photography by Lisa Robinson  
Styling by Kristin Galloway



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Put plastic bags back to work as plant carriers, furniture-wax mitts, a pet pillow, a tool-belt pocket liner—and more.



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**A. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND** *Continued*



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## letter {from This Old House}

### Oh, the horror!

"This" says with a gasp when she sees the pumpkin-carving photo we took for this month's Letter From This Old House "horror."

"No," she said, "I mean, really scary. You look like a homicidal maniac! Like you're in a horror movie."

Not exactly the effect I was going for. But can't be told, she might have a point. At least sometimes I feel like I'm in a horror movie. My particular fix, though, isn't to watch *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* or *The Legend of Hell House*. Take, for example, this scene, which transpired last last Wednesday night.

We click off the TV to turn in. On the way out of the living room, my wife points at the ceiling and says, *My! Do you see that crack?* I say, *How? I don't notice that before. My wife says, Is it okay?* I say, *Sure—it's just a little crack. We clean the walls, fix the lily, and before long I am leaving that rooming neighbor about my contractor when—*

CRACKAAAAAASHHHHHH!

I am awake and out of bed and racing down the stairs onto a cloud of dust, the noise still echoing. The ceiling is on the floor. Chunks of plaster are on the carpet, the sofa, the TV, everywhere. Just like that, after 150 years of being up, it came down.

Why does a ceiling just fall down? You could blame age. After all, it's been fighting gravity for 13 (thirteen!) decades. It's seen 520 seasons of temperature change. It's suffered a leaky radiator. And it's endured plenty of vibrations from the construction we recently finished in the room above and below.

But somehow I can't help feeling it's a little more personal than that.

To me, it's one more example of the house slipping on its rocky mask and playing Jenga while I ride the roller of doom's carpet. To be honest, I really wonder if the plaster's cursed. And if it is, I wonder if you know how to remove it. Please? If you've got a solution to offer, send me a note at [scott@thisoldhouse.com](mailto:scott@thisoldhouse.com).

Meanwhile, I've got something to offer you—a great story if you don't have to worry about the ceiling but still have a hankering for home improvement. "100-DAY Upgrade for Under \$100" is for you. It's packed with ideas that, I think, it's worth the price of the issue all by itself. You'll find it on page 100.

Scott Gammelle  
SCOTT GAMMELLE  
EDITOR

P.S. Here's something else scary: *TOM TV* starts a new season this month, and this one marks its... 30th! Fighting from last year's slip away, especially because it seems like it all started just a little while ago. Of course, a lot has changed since 1979. For one, *TOM* means carpenter Norm Abram and the rest of the crew had a lot less gray hair then (and I actually had hair). For one thing about *TOM* has remained constant: the quality craftsmanship, education, and inspiration it continues to bring to viewers who are passionate about their homes. Go to [thisoldhouse.com/tv](http://thisoldhouse.com/tv) to find out when the new season can be your own.



### TWO SYMBOLS IN THIS ISSUE →

- 1. Save your money** We don't exactly buy a dollar these days? Look for this symbol on value-packed stories that help pay for the biggest bang for your home-improvement buck.
- 2. Save inspiration** Lower your utility bills (and your carbon footprint) with energy-saving upgrades—and get a refresher on your tools. Look for this symbol behind great ideas throughout.





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## readermail

Attention to detail. It's what we admire in fine-old houses—and in your recent letters. Once again you've shown us that it's details you really care about. Here, astute observations about inspiring stories, the safety of stone counters, and the right word.

### We build confidence, too

Just read the July/August issue and here to say I haven't felt this way about an issue of any magazine in ages. Each article struck a chord with me—the paint combos, basic anatomy, budget kitchen upgrades—and I found your encouraging articles easy to follow. I'm not an experienced DIYer, but I do have a strong yearning to become better. This issue has helped me take a massive step forward.

—AMY LUTHER, SEATTLE

### Counter concerns

While reading "All About Stone Countertops" (July/August), I recalled a medical program on TV in which the doctor discussed radiation scans with granite and other stone counters. They said that, because uranium is in granite rocks, granite has levels of radiation that could affect one's health. Is it true?

—JOHN MCDONALD  
TECHNICAL EDITOR/CHIEF

The editors reply: Some granite counters emit low levels of radiation, but studies we've seen say you get higher doses of radiation on a cross-country flight than from a granite counter. After testing hundreds of

samples, the *National Institute of Standards* could find none that were radioactive enough to be considered dangerous by the Environmental Protection Agency standards.

### Get out the dictionary

In "Make a Pot Kook From Copper Pipe" (July/August), note that it was copper tube you were using, not copper pipe.

—TIM SHERON, BUREAU OF P

The editors reply: You're absolutely right, Tim. We took some articles license in order to use a term more familiar to readers. But technically, only a thinner-walled and used in residential and commercial applications, pipe is thicker-walled and used for industrial purposes.

how  
to reach  
us

The editors:  
Two Old House magazine  
editors: 2005 Street, New  
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• Include your full name,  
address, and phone number.  
Published letters are edited for  
clarity and length.

## My own built-in bbq

ALAN O'NEILL/STUDIO MCM

I finally built my grill, inspired by the one I saw in the July/August Old House. I stuck to your plan for the base and framing but used slate tiles instead of stone veneer (slate was cheaper and offered a look I preferred). I went with diamond patterns on concrete to create a pair of focal points. The masonry framing is the highlight of my kitchen with the slate. Thanks for the awesome idea!



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bbq

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**10%**  
Percentage of homeowners who have conducted a home energy audit in the past two years

### ENERGY SAVING

#### A clean sweep

Looking to ditch your drafty gut-guttering installation—but still hold onto the old? April 1st saw a slew of push lawn sweepers with great old-fashioned-manual technology to make guttering leaves so easy to moving the lawn. Bussing brushes with leaves into a shaver so that they can be easily bagged, switched, or added to a compost pile. The roll-up gutter leaves appear in your storage shed. \$100. [sign-hub.com](http://sign-hub.com)



Reporting by Kelli Fendoff and Natalie Anderson



### LAST-OF-ITS-KIND

#### A window into savings

Redwood's home heating bills are a big achievement for anyone, but for Greg and Jennifer Quirby (left) at Winthrop, Maine, it was also the result of a lucky break. They were paying \$5,000 a year to keep their 2000 home's heating system when they were told to "look into a bill"—a new \$100 a year energy audit. The audit revealed a leak in the boiler, a cracked furnace, and a broken boiler. The Quirbys had the boiler replaced, the furnace repaired, and the boiler replaced. The audit also revealed a leak in the boiler, a cracked furnace, and a broken boiler. The Quirbys had the boiler replaced, the furnace repaired, and the boiler replaced.

**NEWSFLASH**—A member of the 19th century historic building to save the loss of thousands of early residents. Now the owner wants to build an artificial conservatory for the bells so that the building can be saved too.

### DIY-TO-DO

#### Rent those rays of sunshine

The sun savings line. The big, shiny panels you need to explore it, not so much. Now a few companies in Oregon, California, and other western states are making solar energy more affordable by offering leasing programs (with the option to buy) on systems they design, install, and maintain. Monthly payments for these programs are often less than an average electricity bill. Says SolarCity spokesman Jonathan Reed, "Some prices start from \$100 a month (if you have a solar panel a month, he says). Keep in mind that you might have an electric bill that's one more panel than your panels provide."



### DIY-TO-DO

#### He said, she said

When asked which kitchen appliance they'd most like to replace, men voted for new blenders, while women voted for new dishwashers. So the next time you're in the kitchen, you'll have a better idea of what your partner wants.





## + SINKING

## Cures for creaks

There are 3 creaks in every creaky floor. — a creak in the floor, a creak in the wall, and a creak in the ceiling. Check out these remedies for creaks in the floor, wall, and ceiling.

—JIMMY K. HARRIS



## Creaky floors

This problem typically arises when the floor joists have shifted or the floorboards have sagged. To fix this, you can use a floorboard lifter to push the floorboards back up.

## Creaky walls

If you're having creaks in your walls, it's likely that the wall studs are loose. To fix this, you can use a wall stud lifter to push the wall studs back up.

## Creaky ceilings

If you're having creaks in your ceiling, it's likely that the ceiling joists are loose. To fix this, you can use a ceiling joist lifter to push the ceiling joists back up.



## + GARDENING

## pro-advice

JOY FAYNE, HORTICULTURIST, NEW YORK BOTANICAL GARDEN

## Plant bulbs faster

Drill hole in soil. Deep in bulb cover, repeat. That's how Lady Payne gets bulbs in the ground, with the help of a auger and woodworking bits 1 to 3 inches in diameter. "This method is very effective for making holes quickly in compacted soil," she says. Use smaller bits for crocus and dwarf iris bulbs, larger ones for bigger tulips and daffodils. Working with a partner who plants while you drill makes the project even speedier. —SAL VALLA

## + OUTDOOR PROJECTS

## Sealing asphalt

Seal, seal, seal! — your driveway will take a beating this winter and if you don't protect it from the elements now you may have serious damage next spring. Apply a latex sealer before it gets too cold and you'll keep oil spills (which instantly crackle asphalt) and water (which seeps into the asphalt and heaves) and create a barrier against corrosion. I seal my calls. But before you do it, take note of these key dos and don'ts:

- **Seal using brushes.** When considering the solvent or solvent-free sealers, use a brush to get into the cracks and crevices.
- **Seal on a dry day.** If you're sealing your driveway, it should be dry for at least 24 hours before you seal it.
- **Seal on a warm day.** The temperature should be at least 50 degrees Fahrenheit.
- **Seal on a clean surface.** Before you seal, you should clean the surface of the driveway.
- **Seal on a dry surface.** The surface should be dry for at least 24 hours before you seal it.
- **Seal on a warm surface.** The surface should be at least 50 degrees Fahrenheit.
- **Seal on a clean surface.** Before you seal, you should clean the surface of the driveway.
- **Seal on a dry surface.** The surface should be dry for at least 24 hours before you seal it.
- **Seal on a warm surface.** The surface should be at least 50 degrees Fahrenheit.

## KEEP ANIMALS OUT

## + WATERPROOFING

## No-bait critter control

It may be tempting to treat mice and rats with bait, but John Griffin, director of the nonprofit Wildlife Services, says poison isn't the best way to keep critters out of your house long-term. (He says you won't have to worry about kids poisoning the bait.) These tips will discourage critters from stepping inside your house.

**SEAL UP WEAR AND TEAR.** Exterior damage, such as sagging trim boards, rotting siding, and gaps between roof shingles, not only is entry points, but it also shows where critters can get in. If you don't have time for a full repair, seal the damage with a large gap sealant or a gap filler. Seal the rest of the damage with a gap filler.

**TRIM VEGETATION.** Overgrown shrubs and plants provide cover for critters. Make sure there is at least 18 inches of space between your house and any shrubs or plants. Cut the branches back 6 feet from the root to eliminate a direct pathway to your critters.

**MINIMIZE ACCESS TO FOOD.** Your garbage can and pet's food bowl are a free buffet. Secure the can as well, and make sure it's not full. Store pet food in airtight containers. If you have a pet, make sure you don't leave food out for them. If you have a pet, make sure you don't leave food out for them.

**MAKE THEM UNCOMFORTABLE.** If you notice a few critters in the attic, don't just make them uncomfortable. Try using a few traps. If you have a pet, make sure you don't leave food out for them. If you have a pet, make sure you don't leave food out for them.



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# Plastic bags

Sure, you can line your bathroom trash can with them. But check out these other clever recycling ideas, too.

## 1 Fill in gaps.

Stuff plastic bags into cavities around pipes, ducts, or other wall or floor penetrations to provide a solid seal before filling walls with spackling or caulk.

## 2 Protect fruit.

Two months before plastic bags even nearly rip, pull on a line to keep out bugs and prevent spiral frost damage.



## 3 Apply wax and cream.

Use a bag as a mitt to spread furniture wax or polish. Then buff it to a shiny finish using a clean, dry cloth.



## 4 Transport unpotted plants.

Divide evergreen plants and place entire in bags to contain the soil, and keep plants alive while you carry them to a friend.

## 5 Seal a paint can.

When you're done painting, slip a plastic bag over the paint can lid before replacing it so that dirt or flakes of dried paint won't fall in the can while it sits under the lid.

## 6 Keep your jeans clean.

Put jeans in the bottom of backpacks and wear the bags in the pockets to protect your pants while you're on the go.



## 8 Save time after a storm.

Expect big shower stalls? Tie plastic bags around your car's side-view mirrors so that you don't have to scrape snow off them just to peek the bags off and you're on your way.

## 9 Keep your dog or cat comfy.

Stuff an old pillowcase full with plastic bags to use the open end and closed tied top to keep your pet snug on a long nap.

## 10 Corral hardware.

Use half-bag pockets with a bag to hold up to 10 screws or nails. Use the open end to hold up to 10 screws or nails. Use the open end to hold up to 10 screws or nails.

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## KNOW YOUR TURF

### HEALTHY HOME

## Is lead lurking in your garden?

If you weren't one of the estimated 43 million folks who played cobbles this year, now's the time to, um, play your victory garden for next spring. Before you start, get your soil tested for lead, which can contaminate vegetables and herbs and cause health problems—especially in kids—if it's accidentally ingested while digging in the dirt. Though some of the contamination naturally in the environment, soil picks up excess lead from homes painted before 1976, as well as emissions from old leaded fuel burning cars and other sources. So if you've got an older house or live in an urban area, it's wise to be cautious. Testing costs \$10 to \$20; find a certified lab through the National Lead Information Center at 800-424-LEAD (5333), then follow these guidelines when you get the results. —NATL. LEAD CTR.



The easiest soil test finding: dig up three to 12 samples to test for lead in a 10-foot by 10-foot area where you want to garden. Mix the dirt in a clean container and put enough in a suitable plastic bag. Check with your lab for more specifics.

### Test Results

Less than 200  
parts per million  
(ppm)

200 to 1,000 ppm

1,000 ppm or more

### Actions to Take

- Lead levels naturally in soil at concentrations below 100 ppm. If your results are higher than this, you can still plant vegetables safely as long as your soil's pH is above 6.5. (Acids soil makes it more likely to be absorbed by roots.)
- Don't eat leafy greens (e.g., spinach or romaine) or root crops (e.g., carrots). Quit for buying vegetables instead, such as tomatoes, squash, and corn.
- Keep your soil's pH level above 6.5 in these plants from taking up lead from the soil. Mixing soil with organic matter helps pH rise, also, but only if lead is not rising in 3 feet to 6 inches of soil.
- Always wear gloves and wash up after gardening.
- Plants grow your garden plot to another area—perhaps further from your home or farther from heavily trafficked road. Remove any plants in containers, or set up raised beds with plastic or landscape cloth and 6-inch soil of lead-free soil at first topsoil.
- If you have to plant in the troubled area, remove and replace topsoil that is higher than 6 inches.

NOTE: If you have lead-based lead in your garden, you can't eat vegetables grown in the soil. You can eat vegetables grown in the soil, but you can't eat vegetables grown in the soil.



## GET YOUR TO-DO LIST BACK

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before+after:  
kitchen

## Bold color makeover

A few cans of paint turn a cold white kitchen into a warm, cheerful space full of character. By DIANE ARNETT • Photograph by MARK LORBERMAN

Nothing screams an old house like an energetic new color scheme. In Rich and Sue Linder's 1940s ranch house in Laguna Beach, California, a previously remodelled but behind-the-scenes white kitchen, save for the screen-moulded 1945 stove, seemed far from her mother. White beadboard and glass-front cabinets mixed with open shelves, a red range hood and pendant lights helped to in the vintage range-fall, the room looked a little sad.

So the couple called in local colorist Kathleen Jewell. She took one look at the light pouring in on three sides and drew up a palette befitting the sunny spot, including bright yellow walls, a cream ceiling, and lime green accents. Jewell set off the couple's colorful makeover with a dynamic turquoise backdrop and gave the room an edge, finally, with black trim around doors, windows, and floorboards. That revved-up range finally has surroundings that suit its playful spirit. Says Sue of the space: "It's fun and uplifting, and makes us smile."

**before** Earlier upgrades brought in open shelves and white walls, and, well, a stove for the fridge and toaster. Jewell: "The cabinets and counters stayed the same. But a carefully chosen palette of colors makes the remodelled room as warm and welcoming as its 1940s stove."

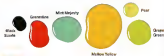


↑  
Poling green on the ceiling blends with the walls, making the small room look bigger.



## a palette with punch

Original Kristeen Jewell interview with *Beats* via e-mail used in this project.  
 Photo: Kristeen Jewell as a young woman, c. 1970s, from the *Beats* series. Photo: [Steve](#)



## hombrowner Ego

“Let a favorite place set the tone for a paint redo, and devise your color palette around it. We had a collection of colorful tablecloths and a bright red stove, and we went from there.”

before + after

The layout of the 25th square-foot gallery remains the same, with a new lot above it added and a new entrance to the gallery added.



before+after kitchen

## • the key details

• **The window** was treated in black to give the white shutters a sophisticated edge. Inexpensive wood shutters were mixed up with a 1950s chair.

• **The ceiling** is yellow-green, a mid-century alternative to white, with white and colored pendant lights.



• **Cups & saucers** are now in a black frame and turquoise palette on the back.



• **point the finger**  
A hand-drawn arrow points to the wall in the kitchen.



• **Green wall** is a color that helps set off the dining area. White retro-style chairs, white walls, and a turquoise and black palette tie it in to the kitchen.

• **The 1945 range** by G. Kuhn & M. W. is a family heirloom. The new vintage look range has a green wall design that looks like a 1945 kitchen.

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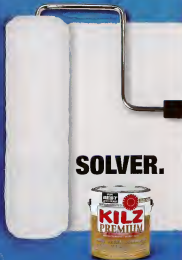


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paint  
ideas

## Add a bamboo grove by brushing on glaze

A neutral bath gains depth and interest with a nod to nature  
BY DEBORAH BALDWIN • Photography: DEBORAH WITTE/LAW LEE/VELLUM

Bamboo has been a popular design motif since the 18th century. But decorative painter Brian Carter had a fresher, cleaner look in mind when he updated this large bath. Rather than splash the walls with leaves, he added a strand of bamboo stripes, with declared bands of color suggesting the nodes on bamboo stalks. The pattern gives the walls a subtle kick while making very reference to the current color for all things green.

Carter used painter's tape to create 2- to 4-inch wide stripes on walls painted with Benjamin Moore's Shaker Beige. "Make the stripes different widths for the most natural look," he says. Starting at the top, he brushed on glaze in sections 9 to 12 inches long, leaving every other one black—and making sure to offset the sections from one stripe to the next. Once the glaze was dry, he filled in the black areas, overlapping brush marks to create the nodes. Bamboo is a fun way to bring up feet, and this small room is no exception. The walls were done in a weekend. ■

"Oil-based glaze dries slowly, so you can keep the color even and clean up any mistakes." says Carter. Using a 2-inch wide brush, he created horizontal stripes, overlapping glaze and medium strokes to bring up the nodes on stalks of bamboo.



Black accents give the wall its wall exactly a sophisticated edge and white a pop of color.



**pro advice:** BRIAN CARTER, DECORATIVE PAINTER, ATLANTA  
"Choose a tint for your glaze that reinforces a color in the room. The raw umber I chose here brings out the shading in the limestone tile."

11

"THE BELLWOOD FINISH IS AMAZING. WE PUT WALNUT IN OUR MEDIA ROOM. LOTS OF TEENAGERS, LOTS OF TRAFFIC AND TWO DOGS. WE HAVE OTHER HARDWOOD AND IT DOESN'T EVEN COME CLOSE TO THE LOOK AND TOUGHNESS OF BELLWOOD."

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## landscaping

### Snip now for (free!) plants next spring



Many popular plants that shiver in winter can be propagated from cuttings, put in pots, and grown indoors till the weather warms. Here's how. BY SAL VINCIGRA

Hitting the garden center in March or April so key plants in bells for your cuttings, window boxes, and flower beds can take a toll on your wallet. So if you've got favorites such as clematis, geraniums, and impatiens still looking lush in your yard right now, and you live somewhere with a real winter, think about propagating them before they wither away.

Any tender perennial—plants grown in annuals whenever there's a wintered hard freeze—can be grown from simple-to-take cuttings. Harvest small stems before the fast-growing frost, put them up indoors, and they'll overwinter with the winter in time to fill in bare areas in your landscape come spring. Just park them on a south-facing windowsill and watch them grow.

For a complete step-by-step on propagating from cuttings, read on.



Verticillate wilt makes a central shoot fall out and is easy to propagate



**pro advice** ROBERT E. LYONS, PROFESSOR OF LANDSCAPE HORTICULTURE, UNIVERSITY OF DELAWARE, NEWARK, DE

"As you're taking cuttings, be sure to clean your snips with rubbing alcohol as you move from plant to plant to make sure you don't spread disease."



#### Other popular plants to try

Just about any tender perennial is a good bet for propagation. Here are some favorites.



Geranium (*Pelargonium*)



Millie Bellie (*Cynanchum*)



Candy Million (*Clematis vitalba*)



Lupinus (*Lupinus*)



Fuchsia (*Fuchsia*)

#### now it's done

**1. Take a cutting.** With a clean pair of garden snips or scissors, cut off a stem that's three to six inches long, leaving leaves on the stem. Pick a few flowers, and the leaves on the bottom third of the stem. To keep cuttings from drying out where you work, call them live moist paper towels. Stack them inside a zip-top bag, and keep the bag out of direct sun.

**2. Dip in rooting hormone.** To encourage root development, pour powdered rooting hormone available at garden centers into a small dish, then roll and dip the cut end until it's thoroughly coated. If using liquid hormone, soak the cut end for 5 seconds.

**3. Pot it up.** Fill small pots or flats with a sterile soilless potting mix, moisten with water. Using a pencil or chopstick, make holes for the

cuttings, spacing them at least 1/2 inch apart. Insert each cutting at least 1 inch deep, then pack the mix around the stem.

**4. Keep them moist.** Using chopsticks or small wood dowels as supports, drape 1/2 mil plastic sheeting over the pots (or flats) to create a makeshift greenhouse. Place them out of direct sun and keep the mix moist. Check the cuttings weekly for root development by gently tugging on the leaves to see if they come out easily; remove the cuttings when you feel strong resistance. Once the roots have developed, gently pry up the cuttings with a butter knife, replant them in potting soil, and add a balanced fertilizer. Pick the young plants in mid-June for the first week. After that, move them to spots in full sun through the winter and water as needed before moving them outside in the spring. ■

Photo: iStockphoto.com/Chris Jones; Photos: iStockphoto.com/Chris Jones

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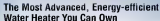
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## Low-flow showerheads

Less water, just as much relaxation? That's the promise of these two showerheads, which aim to deliver with different technologies—and price tags. BY JESSICA SALOWY • Photos by Gregory

price  
wise

[illegible]

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Flour 1.5gallons per volume **Marquette Libraries**

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15. ПЕРВЫЙ

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setting, makes  
the company  
an ideal location  
for a visit, makes  
the visit a reality.

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Lighter weight chrome  
brushed-plated alloy  
available in other finishes

function.

After each patient through a large restriction four large stainless-steel or Teflon tubes or 3 inches wide at shoulder height. A plastic ring clamp, inserted from high-end, should be used with their smaller openings. The sprayer makes it easier to use.

2004-2005

This, clearly, means  
a clearly, obviously  
best path, not hard  
just to contribute to  
the project.

how it does.

### Discussion

hiker passes through a line of waterfalls to meet forest through a smaller chamber for hiker's sake. Truly, two rivers and a spring with a small lake of water. The trail is a good one for a walk. It is a good one for a walk. It is a good one for a walk.

© 2001 THE TRIMBLE COMPANY 11

# Pergola-topped porch

Salvaged posts, a slatted roof, and flea-market furnishings create an instant outdoor room. Here's how to put together a similar space at your house. **by TARA HAZLETON • Photograph by JERRY DODSON**

Nothing creates a snug corner like a front porch. So adding this kind of sheltered outdoor space is a major undertaking. Here, Linda Peen and her corporate husband, Gene Genova, got a similarly charming space in space at their Woodstock, New York, home with a few shortcuts. Gene used pine saw-treated decking for the floor and topped it with a slatted pergola roof that he supported with vintage porch posts. Then Linda furnished the space with comfortable flea-market finds for a level in luck. While the honey roof may not keep raindrops at bay, it's perfect for stargazing. Here, ideas for assembling a similar look at your home.



**trim onlar**  
A large white or  
pale yellow-painted  
post supports  
brown vinyl seats.  
Pittsburgh-Pitts.  
\$100 per gallon.  
www.hunterdou.com

## red adirondack chair

This bright take on classic lawn furniture warms up the outdoor space. \$299. [thetrust.com](http://thetrust.com)



## glazed pot

A large green  
planter filled with  
flowers adds a touch  
of color to the scene. \$40.  
[kirkconcepts.com](http://kirkconcepts.com)



## outdoor oriental rug

A warm silk rug in recycled polyester  
makes an open air room feel fully  
finished. \$225. [madronequality.com](http://madronequality.com)



## bright pillows

Decorative  
pillows in  
vibrant colors  
add a touch of  
color to the  
space. \$22 (set of 2).  
[www.pillows.com](http://www.pillows.com)



## honeycomb tip

Choose a pattern for  
cushions that connects  
with the colors of the  
house and garden to tie  
the outdoor living space  
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get  
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color that works  
with the outdoor  
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# All lawns are bad and other green myths

TOH debunks some commonly held misconceptions about sustainable products and practices. By KATH PARSONS • Illustrations by ELLEN WINTERSON

**Myth:** To really save on my utility bills, I need to invest in renewable energy.

**Reality:** It would be great if we could all tap into solar, wind, and geothermal technologies, but there are still some good ways for many of us. In the meantime, you can lessen your demand for nonrenewable energy by up to 40 percent by simply plugging gaps, holes, and other air leaks in your house. Be sure to check weatherstripping seals in your exterior doors (which tend to accommodate wear). Picking them in can be more effective than adding another layer of insulation.

**Myth:** If it plugs in, it's an energy vampire when it's off.

**Reality:** A lot of people ask us if their toasters and lamps are sucking up energy when they're turned off. The answer: Unless it has a power adapter, or clock, it's not burning energy. The worst offender by far? Your cable box, which can half the size of an Energy Star fridge, even when you're not watching HBO. So plug that sucker into a power strip and switch it off when you're away.

**Myth:** My lawn needs to go.

**Reality:** America's 16 million acres of lawns present some serious environmental challenges at times. They demand an outlandish amount of water, and many rely on pesticides, herbicides, and chemical fertilizers to stay healthy. But you can maximize the benefits by using native hot grass, which requires less water and a more efficient fertilizer that can naturally kill, say, Kentucky bluegrass (a.k.a. from Europe). The best-lawn-care



↑  
Slow-growing  
native buffle  
grass needs to be  
mowed only  
once a month

and a buffle grass, which is naturally resistant to drought, disease, and pests. It likes plenty of sun, though, so if conditions aren't conducive to growing it, consider at least reducing the size of your lawn. Euphorbia rosea rose with native groundcover (where it's shady) or native ornamental grasses (where it's sunny). Then cut your lawn's addition to pesticides and other chemicals by going organic. Visit [thehouse.com/shows/tohshow](http://thehouse.com/shows/tohshow) to learn how.

**Myth:** Incandescent lightbulbs will not be available much longer.

**Reality:** While most incandescent bulbs currently on the market won't meet strict energy-consumption regulations in this effort in 2012, all the major lighting manufacturers are working overtime to come up with more energy-efficient versions of the Thomas Edison original. Phillips has already introduced a halogen incandescent that uses 10 percent less power

than an older bulb. So if you're a fan of CFLs, know that there's still a light at the end of the tunnel.

**Myth:** Compost smells bad.

**Reality:** Not if you're asking it right. The secret to keeping the stink out is creating a perfect balancing act between your "browns" (carbon-based plant material) and your "greens" (nitrogen-based plant material). The former can include leaves, twigs, and wood chips, shredded newspaper, and cardboard-like items may contain both and vegetable scraps, grass clippings, and coffee grounds. Layer them in equal amounts in your pile, then turn it once a week by turning it with a pitchfork. Never over-add dairy products, greasy foods, or meat, which can set you back as they rot. When properly maintained, a compost pile should have no smell at all.

**Myth:** I should never use my fireplace.

**Reality:** Traditional fireplaces add a nuisance, but they also suck most of your heated air right up the chimney. You can fix that. Fireplace inserts decrease the amount of heated air lost by up to 60 percent and are available for both wood- and gas-burning fireplaces. The inserts actually insulate doors and a sealed surround that lets you control air input and heat output. Even better are super-high-efficiency wood- or pellet-burning stoves, some of which are sold as inserts that can be installed in your existing fireplace.

**Myth:** Bamboo is always a good alternative to wood.

**Reality:** Not this bamboo grass grows lightning fast, making it a potentially renewable and a great alternative to backing down old-growth forests. Engineered right, it's as solid as oak, too. Here's the thing: It takes a lot of fuel to get bamboo, mostly grown in China, to your doorstep, since bamboo products contain toxic leachates and adhesives and a lot of it is grown with some regulation over its harvesting practices and work conditions. Some bamboo is harvested before it fully matures, rendering the products made from it a lot less durable. To make sure your bamboo is as green as it can be, ask how it's treated and manufactured. You can also look for third-party certifications from Sustainable Certification Systems (SCS), which costs no more than \$100,000, or the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC), which certifies bamboo products and looks at everything from harvesting to conservation practices.



Compost your natural green waste for groceries you'll come springtime

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**Myth:** If I really want to save water, I have to buy new toilets.

**Reality:** Before 1994, most toilets used a whopping 3.5 gallons of water to flush. That's about 10 gallons per person each day. But if your toilet was made after '94, the year the federal government required that toilets use no more than 1.6 gallons per flush, you already have what's known as a low-flow toilet. You can save even more water by installing inexpensive toilet dams, which can easily be inserted at the back of your tank, and hold back about 1.3 gallons of water per flush. Of course, the most efficient toilets

these days are dual-flush models, which offer a 1.6-gallon-per-flush mode and one that uses as little as .09. Recently, the Florida company started offering an easy-to-install remote device (about \$100) that turns existing toilets into dual-flush models.

**Myth:** Programmable thermostats aren't that green.

**Reality:** A lot of people seem to think that once a programmable thermostat turns off your heat or AC at a preset temperature, the cost of reheating or cooling their home back to a comfortable temperature outweighs the savings. But the fact remains: The longer your heating or cooling system is turned off, the greater the savings. In the winter, lowering your thermostat 10 to 15 degrees for 8 hours a day can save you up to 10 percent on your heating bills. Just set it to turn up the heat by the time you get home.

**Myth:** There's no real way to know if a product is as green as it claims.

**Reality:** Yes, there's plenty of so-called greenwashing out there. But aside from the SCS and FSC certifications, there are other third-party groups whose logos indicate products are as green as they say they are. The most widely known is the EPA's Energy Star logo, a light measure of a product's energy-saving qualities. You can also look for logos from GreenDeal, which scrutinizes products' green cred, including the amount of recycled content used. Just recently the century-old Underwriters Laboratories, a reputable third-party agency that does product safety testing, launched the UL Environmental logo, an indication that a product's environmental claims have indeed been validated.

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green  
tips  
to save time  
and money  
you'll find out  
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**MINWAX.**Architectural  
birdhouses

By MICHAEL DOUGENOFF • Photography by MARK VETTEL

this one's a duplex

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- **Propane is accommodating.** Underground propane tanks allow homeowners to have all the luxury gas appliances they dream without sacrificing curb appeal.
- **Propane is ideal for community planning.** Entire developments are now using underground propane storage systems, with centralized tank, gas main and metered access to propane.
- **Propane can outfit any size home.** Generally, a 500-gallon tank easily accommodates an average four-bedroom home.
- **Propane is safe.** "Green" homeowners appreciate propane's clean, efficient and environmentally-friendly properties. Constructed of heavy steel and specially painted with a marine coating to prevent corrosion, underground tanks will easily last decades.
- **Propane is versatile.** With the option for above-ground or underground tanks, propane gives homeowners the freedom to choose what's best for their lifestyle.

- A. Installed underground, out of sight
- B. Provides an on-site, independent energy supply
- C. Constructed from recycled steel
- D. Lifespan measured in decades, minimal homeowner maintenance
- E. All of the above

**Answer: E. Make your home a happy and warm one this season with propane.**

With tank burial and landscaping designs able to keep propane tanks out of sight, more and more homeowners are turning to propane to bring the warmth of gas energy to their homes. Work with your local propane retailer and construction professional to learn more.

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**With an underground propane tank, all you'll ever see is the comfort it brings to your home.**

With underground propane tanks, you can get the gas appliances you really want — and curb appeal. The tanks, ranging in size from 120 to 1,000 gallons, can be installed easily underground and last for decades. The only visible sign is a small dome above ground for refilling and servicing. Propane cooktop, furnace, fireplace, and water heater inside, beautiful yard outside. See how an underground propane tank can add to the enjoyment of your home at [usepropane.com](http://usepropane.com)



**PROPANE**  
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## Getting the Tudor treatment

Trimwork spruces up a plain facade, while a gabled addition on master room for a family's growing boys. By DEBORAH DICKINSON • Photo Illustration by HOWARD COBBLE



"We plan to live in our house for a while, and I think it's got enough potential to justify its overhaul," says Gretchen Polachuk, who shares this 1930 house in Alberta, Canada, with her husband, Chris, and twin 8-year-old boys. In *The Old House* and architect Linda Brubaker Smith co-enrich the house's plan exterior.

The second facade and steeply pitched roof inspired Brubaker Smith to treat the house with Tudor-style elements, such as the central color palette and trimwork under the gable roof. "These details create visual interest by breaking up the front of the house into smaller elements," she says. A porch and second-story bay window add variety to the house's exterior while offering a modest increase in floor space. The gabled second-story addition facing the street is, admittedly, a much bigger renovation, but Brubaker Smith says it's a smart option if the couple wants to stay put as their sons grow. "This addition looks rich and elegant and square footage, both of which add value," she says. And that's just what Gretchen and Chris are looking for. ■

### Finishing touches

Shave sheetrock on chimney and add trimwork for a Tudor-style exterior.



**paint**  
Trimwork and door sets off the classic cream and Tudor brown combo. From top: Woodburn, Larch, Sunbrella, Earth and Pals Red by Valspar \$33 per gallon



**lantern**  
This is the classic English lantern for a Tudor house. From top: Woodburn, Larch, Sunbrella, Earth and Pals Red by Valspar \$33 per gallon



**house number**  
Get the details on a durable and stylish house number. From top: Woodburn, Larch, Sunbrella, Earth and Pals Red by Valspar \$33 per gallon



**window box**  
Contribute to a durable and stylish house number. From top: Woodburn, Larch, Sunbrella, Earth and Pals Red by Valspar \$33 per gallon

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animal  
house

## High cuisine for canines

An elevated feeding station will save your best friend's neck—and it's great for storage, too  
by KATHY JANDOLFI • Photographs by KATHLEEN T. WEBER

If your perfect kitchen design is being compromised by drooping dog bowls and the dust-up chaos they can reach when you enter a room, feeding station for your dog. This well-built custom furniture will not only save the beauty of your space—and protect the bowls, ears and heads in your pet's path—by keeping your dog's head up and your pet's head down. The elevated platform will also give your furry friend some much-needed neck and back relief as he nibbles his kibble. This is especially helpful for large breed dogs, like Great Danes and Doberman Pinschers, or puppies who are getting on in years. It will be helpful to you, too, since it's easy to fill and clean up food. Oh, and one last thing: It looks like you're good.



The height is just for cleaning. A big space, built-in all over, from it an easy to reach place.



#### animal house

#### FUNCTIONAL FEATURES

Mixes three places to park water bowls, dog feeding station and dog house with pet necessities.

**to try**  
A convenient dog water bowl is ready to be poured for fill up or cleaning.

**bonus**  
Shower dog in petting house with a dog play pen for even the most eager water.

**feature**  
Built with the best all-weather dog is shoulder height is robust no base keeps a pet from drinking. Pet house is the perfect doghouse.

**storage**  
Space enough for large dog house. Great for dog house. Dogs will love it if given unlimited access to food. Pet house is the perfect doghouse.

**surface**  
Contact paper covering the dog house makes it easy to clean.

#### Food matters

A balanced and organized feeding station is only half the battle proper feeding is a must for your pooch. There is a simple rule of thumb for figuring out if your choices are good: says American Kennel Club dog expert Lisa Peterson, "If your dog eats it and seems healthy, with a shiny coat and bright eyes, then you've probably found the right food." Here are some other things to consider when feeding your dog:

- **Consistent:** Give adult dogs a consistent routine—and type—of food just before a day.
- **Availability:** Except one make dogs finish or turn them off if they food together. Treats are okay but—like treats for humans—only in moderation.
- **Consider age:** There's a reason kibble is age-specific for puppies and seniors. The former contains more protein which is essential for growing dogs, while senior formulas have less protein, which is better for an older dog's slower metabolism.

#### build it this weekend!

You've considered this feeding station just one day. Let TCM's pet care editor Mark Powers show you how at [theoldhouse.com/build](http://theoldhouse.com/build).



**(Is my dog fat?)**

Here's a good way to tell if your dog is fat. If you can't feel his ribs or when you pet his side, he's too big. But if you can see his ribs, he's too skinny.



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FROM THE TOH TV APP SITE | Our 30th Anniversary

## Household wisdom: Norm Abram

After three decades in home-improvement TV, the TOH master carpenter has plenty of homeowner advice. Here's his take on tools, houses, and the design detail that all kitchens should have. *Photography by MICHAEL LEVINE*

In 1979, a young carpenter named Norm Abram went to work on a renovation that was being filmed for a new television documentary series called *The Old House*. Now, as TOH celebrates 30 years of home improvement—during 36 house projects and more than 770 episodes—the star of the show's daily of all home-improvement TV shows has acquired a lot of useful insight about renovation and homeownership. This column lists 10 TOH nuggets about Norm to share a few of his unique insights.

Norm has watched many people struggle with the renovation process. Here's what he thinks homeowners should consider before they start:

"It's important to think about how improvement is the long run. If you're going to spend a lot to redo a kitchen and you're only going to live there two years, you might want to rethink that project. Because there's no guarantee you're going to get your money back."

He warns that making a dream come true often involves being willing to compromise—especially on money issues.

"I feel that homeowners tend to make the value of their dream. They have an expectation that their renovation is going to cost X dollars. But it's very unlikely they would get a bid and go, 'Wow! That's a lot less than I thought it was going to be!'"

"People always say, 'How can we save money?' And they start to pick a bid and try to save by making small changes. But they really need to make big changes—cut out a special project or reconsider the design itself."



Photo © J. LEVINE

Consider logistics, too, because it all comes back to money:

"If you're doing a total kitchen, move out. The only way you can live in a total renovation is to phase it so you can live in one. But it always gets more costly to do only a little bit of something—like electrical—rather than do it all at once."

Through his hopes those who buy old houses would want to preserve original details. Norm believes a house can evolve.

"A lot of deciding what to keep and what to replace is personal. Sometimes the material will be good, but you look at it and say, 'I just don't like this.' Your home is a place you want to feel really comfortable in."

Norm gets to meet a lot of enthusiastic woodworkers and home-renovating addicts as he travels. His best advice? Don't get discouraged.

"People who get into woodworking and renovations may not succeed the first time around. But, hey, if they get halfway through a project and have some level of success, they certainly are going to show off to their friends and pride. That's what's important."

Homeowners should take comfort in knowing that even a "master" can keep learning.

"One outside I made was on one of the first projects on *New Yankee Workshop* [Norm's furniture-building show]. It was a bed/cradle, and I glued the finish edge onto the end grain. Oh I got letters about that! You can't finish those with glue—you have to leave a space for the wood's expansion and contraction. But you learn and you move on."

They also did also know that there's no shame in being aware of your limitations.

"I think there are still some that I'd like to do more often. I'd like to do more heavy carving. And my carving, I think, is adequate, but I think I could improve on that as well."

"One thing I don't want to do anymore is chains. Chains are too hard. I'll buy my chains."

Then drive a few dozen kitchens and you quickly learn what works best.

"The best kitchen after I've seen recently is large drawer units with heavy-duty full-extension hardware instead of base cabinets with doors because how many times have you had to get down on your knees to pick through everything?"

But Norm cautions against falling for a design just because it's popular.

"All of a sudden someone decided that half round windows show multicolored drab things was going to be the way to design houses. I never had them from the beginning, and I still don't. Maybe I'm most of a traditionalist, but they drive me crazy."

Norm built his career as a young man, but he thinks people should rethink design around energy and age concerns.

"The problem with having a lot of space is, you will fill it."

"I live in a large house, but I'm becoming an advocate of smaller houses. My dream would be to build a 2,400 square-foot house—half of what I have now—that's super energy efficient. It would be an open plan—kitchen, family room,

Norm Abram is 30th anniversary of TOH TV's most popular series.



I ring room. I wouldn't put a dining room in at all.

"I'd also put the master bedroom on the first floor. I'm getting older; I don't want to climb stairs."

Some classic features like beams are less appealing if you consider how people really live.

"I like a big shower. If you have young kids, you want a tub. But as an adult, I'd take a shower any day. It's an age thing. I'd rather cut a couple out a tub when I'm 60 years old."

But fine craftsmanship never goes out of style.

"There's nothing like a pleaser job. It's to me, you don't see any more."

"A lot of construction today is sloppy. Not everyone is a Tim Sola. I won't say they aren't a lot of good craftsmen out there, but speculative houses are never really built well. I mean, they meet the building codes, but they're basic drab. They're not examples of craftsmanship."

Coming next month: TOH general contractor Tim Sola talks about how to keep your contractor happy and the worst house he's ever seen. ■

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**money  
savers**



## Get cash back for energy-saving upgrades

You read that right: The Feds will give you a tax credit for making your home more efficient. But their offer won't last forever. Read on for details—and learn which projects pay off most. by [SAVINGDOLLARS.COM](http://SAVINGDOLLARS.COM) • *Illustration by JACOB MC CALLIST*

We know we know: The economy's iffy, jobs are tight, housing values aren't what they once were. But if there was ever a perfect time to invest in your place by adding more insulation or replacing a creaky old water heater, it's now. The economic stimulus package passed by Congress last February included a federal tax credit—now just a deduction, but a fall-on-its-side—of 30 percent of the cost of all sorts of energy-saving systems, with a cap of \$1,200 per house, if installed by the end of 2010. These upgrades perk the double benefit of slashing your utility bills while increasing your house's long-term value, too. You probably don't need all these upgrades, but chances are you'll benefit from one or two. Our guide will help you figure out which ones give you the best bang for your buck.

### 1 INSULATION

**You'll pay:** Anywhere from a few hundred bucks for enough batts for the attic to several thousand for a whole-house upgrade.

**You'll save:** Up to 15 to 20 percent on heating and cooling.

**Why do it now?** "I install every home needs more insulation," says Paul Schaefer, a senior analyst with the Vermont Energy Investment Corporation and author of *The Money Energy Diet*. If the heating in your attic is last year's what, think you'll benefit by adding more.

**What to look for:** Qualified products must meet standards established in the 2009 International Energy Conservation Code. Heat-train home options include foam-in-place free-blown batts and cellulose-based spray foam that fills cracks and crevices.



**Bottom line:** Insulation, when paired with other energy-saving upgrades, is probably the most bang for the buck of all efficiency measures. Even without the credit, your payback period may be as little as a year or less. Many state government and utility offer incentives, too—insulate saves rebates of up to \$750.

### 2 ENERGY-STAR read the fine print

Only the most efficient products and systems qualify for the tax credit—and not all Energy Star-labeled products make the cut. And, within-line requirements, the rest of the bill is not included. Look for a list of all the details and links to qualifying products at [energy.gov/assessable](http://energy.gov/assessable). Your tax preparator or broker can help you determine which products fit the bill.





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## Porcelain faucet taps

Install an old set on your sink or in the shower, or get creative and mount them on a board to use as hooks for towels and robes. By AMY R. LARSEN • Photographed by KRISTIN LAUSEN



Look for  
these taps  
in your  
next  
Bensonwood  
home.



hardware technology wise pretty much perfected in the late 19th century. So why'd we have to wait until Case in point: the porcelain cross-handle faucet tap. To crank up the heat in your shower, you just turned that crossbar where the tap worked hot or simply off. These days, getting a satisfying stream can require an extensive manual for navigating a whole lot of digital control panels and high-tech humidity regulators.

Luckily for Eeksters like me, those old spray taps were built to last and will grace the showers and sinks in many a well-preserved bathroom. If you're re-piping with something more modern, and likely less stylish, you can pick up vintage originals at a salvage yard for as little as \$100 a pair. Just be sure to bring your faucet



**shop smart** Most porcelain taps were white. In keeping with late-20th-century tastes for sanitary-looking hardware, Bylot US30s taps came in colors, such as white (left), green (center), and cream (right). To coordinate with Kelly Ford Art Deco style restorations.

with you, or at least the valve stems, when you shop. The metal fittings that connect the taps to the faucets vary, depending on the manufacturer, and finding a good fit for yours will require some trial and error.

If you don't want to muddle with plumbing, contact a new set of those handsome old taps. One idea is to use them as curtain tiebacks, securing them to the wall on either side of a window. Several taps mounted to a board and hung above the window can even take the place of a curtain rod for top panels. Just loop one around each fixed-in-place tap.

For a recycling project that will be right at home as a bedside, try doing what I did and attach a few taps to a handmade wood rack to serve as hooks for towels and robes. Read on to learn how to build one of your own.

## Make a towel rack using vintage porcelain taps

Cross-handle faucet taps are double as hooks. All you've got to do is mount them on a board—I used salvaged barn siding, but any scrap wood will do—and hang the assembly on a wall. For my project, I went a step further, adding a shelf supported by ornate cast-iron brackets (\$22 each from antiquespillage.com). This way I can stack fresh bath towels on top and hang wet ones to dry from the taps below. Dummy-door spinicles, available at home centers for \$4 each, anchor the taps in place, and vintage porcelain escutcheons hide the hardware.



**Cost:** \$100 for two taps and escutcheons, three spinicles and a set of cast-iron brackets. Three 1/2 hour. Difficulty: Simple. Requires only the tools in our checklist.

Photo: Jeffery M. Smith

### STEP BY STEP

**1.** Use a tape measure to determine the rough distance between each tap on your mounting board. Factor in extra inches on either side of the board for the brackets.



**3.** Draw a horizontal line across the center of the mounting board using the straight edge of a combination square. Then mark evenly spaced vertical lines through the horizontal one to indicate where each tap will go.

**2.** Trace a line on the board where its top shelf will sit to figure out how high to position the supporting brackets on either end.



**3.** Position the brackets 1 1/2 inch from the ends of the mounting board, with their tops just below the pencil line. Mark where the brackets' fasteners will go.



**4.** Drill pilot holes for the fasteners and secure the brackets to the board.



**5.** Fill the base of each tap with epoxy and sit them on top of the spinicles. Wait 5 minutes for the epoxy to set. (It takes 1 hour for it to fully cure.)

**6.** Place the dummy spinicles on the marks and drill pilot holes for their fasteners. Secure the spinicles to the board.

**7.** Mix a two-part, fast-drying epoxy formulated for bonding metal (try Loctite Weld, \$4; lowes.com). Spread the epoxy on the base of the porcelain escutcheons and press them over the spinicles.

**8.** First the shelf top on the brackets. To secure it in place, drive three head screws through the shelf end into the top edge of the supporting board. Then pick a new spot on the farmhouse for your new countertop.

**9.** First the shelf top on the brackets. To secure it in place, drive three head screws through the shelf end into the top edge of the supporting board. Then pick a new spot on the farmhouse for your new countertop.



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## In case of emergency

The best ways to protect your house—and your family—from home fires, windstorms, and flooding rains. BY JENNIFER K. HARRIS

Whether it's a downed power line, a flooded home, or a kitchen grease fire, Thomas Kinch is always prepared as how unexpected homeowners are when it comes to facing these house-hold emergencies. The problem, says the 13-year veteran of the Red Cross's Disaster Health Services Unit, is simple. "Most people don't have a glint to deal with them, they have no idea what they'll do." To help you prepare for personal disaster, TDH offers some key tips on protecting your home from damage—and you and your family from harm.



### House fires

The holiday season, with its lit-up lights and cozy Christmas trees, is just around the corner. As Fire Prevention Week begins October 6 (so designated to commemorate the Great Chicago Fire of 1887), now is the perfect time to consider how you can best prevent or escape a homegrown inferno.

A home fire alarm is one of the most important items in each bedroom. Doing so will warn you your chances of surviving a fire more than 80 percent. • Buy a fire extinguisher for each floor. Check periodically to make sure they're charged and that the pressure is at the right level.

• If upstairs bedrooms have just one means of escape, get a fire ladder, which can be anchored in a window to allow you to climb down to safety.

• If there are multiple exits, designate a meeting place where everyone can meet to be accounted for.

• Close up on the basics. Make sure everyone in your household knows that hot shower doors shouldn't be



opened instead it's always better to crawl or walk through smoke passages as it reduces the chance of smoke inhalation.

• For more information, visit the "Preparing and Getting Trained" section at redcross.org or contact your local Red Cross chapter.

### If you live in a wildfire area

Make sure you maintain a 30-foot safety zone around your home with a minimum of trees and vegetation. Replace flammable vegetation, such as pine trees, with less flammable species. For more info, visit fars.gov.



### Windstorms

There are two types of wind emergencies. "Winch" says. "Those you know about well in advance. Like hurricanes, and those you don't—like tornadoes and large windstorms." Either way, he says, it's important your house is safe from falling or hurtling objects, especially trees and branches. Keep a close eye on the trees around your house and trim them whenever you see dead or

safe  
house

TODAY,  
IT'S NOT  
JUST ABOUT  
POWER

IT'S ABOUT  
SMART POWER

# safe house

disasterly times and times. Here are some of the things to consider:

• If a storm is coming, what is the best way to protect your home? Bring your family, pets, and your most valuable items inside.

• Make sure storage sheds and other outbuildings are securely anchored. If they are permanent foundations or with strong tie-down anchors.

• If windows are a constant source of worry, consider buying permanent hurricane shutters, which protect windows from strong winds.

**If you live in a disaster zone:**

There are a number of other things you'll need to combat wind damage. For a complete guide, check out our hurricane preparedness story at [thisdhouse.com/bonus](http://thisdhouse.com/bonus).



## Heavy rains and floods

According to the National Weather Service, flooding causes more damage in the United States than any other severe weather-related event, costing Americans an average of about \$7 billion a year. Remember that flooding can occur anywhere in the country at any time of year, whether it's from rainfall, flash floods, or snowmelt overflows and creeks. Here's what you need to do:

• Have a plumber install a backflow valve so that sewage doesn't back up the line a flood and enter your home.

• Protect your basement from flooding by keeping gutters tightly secured to your home and clear of leaves, dirt, and debris.

• Use a hose to test your downspouts. Make sure they're dumping water at least 4 feet from your home's perimeter. If they dump too close to the foundation, they're a problem.

• Seal basement walls with a sealant to prevent water from seeping in.

• If flooding is a recurring problem, install a sump pump in your basement. Inspect it regularly to make sure it's working properly.

**If you live in a floodplain:**

You'll need to take extra precautions. This can include building your house on a first floor or basement, elevating walls, switches, and electrical boxes at least 1 foot above



## THE ALL-PURPOSE EMERGENCY KIT

No matter what type of emergency you're facing, there are some things every household should have on hand - just in case. Put together a kit for your home, and you'll be ready for anything that you can find. It's a kit that can save your life if the odds are ever against you.

- A first-aid kit with bandages, gauze, scissors, and cleaning wipes
- Three-day supply of bottled water per person
- Hand-crank radio so that you can stay informed in weather reports
- Battery-operated cell phone charger
- Battery-operated flashlight
- Battery-operated lantern or lantern
- Waterproof matches
- Nylon or plastic bag
- Mylar blankets
- Multiple pairs of socks
- Three-day supply of non-perishable food (canned or freeze-dried) for each family member
- Extra batteries
- Work gloves
- Duct tape
- Extra blankets

least 1 foot above the projected flood elevation. Place large basement appliances such as washers and dryers on platforms above the projected flood elevation, and secure fasteners securely to the floor. While it's a big job, you might also want to have flood vents retrofitted into your foundation walls. They swing open during a flood allowing water to flow through your basement instead of seeping into your house. Many homeowners' policies don't cover floods, so if you live in a community participating in the National Flood Insurance Program, buy into it. For more information visit [fema.gov/flood/flood/index.shtml](http://fema.gov/flood/flood/index.shtml).

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The U.S. Green Building Council's Annual Greenbuild Conference & Expo 2009 is heading to the American Southwest. Join us in Phoenix, Arizona on November 8-12. Greenbuilding.com and must come home to all people, boosting the quality of life on our streets across the country and around the world.

And don't miss the conference's Greenbuild Residential Summit. This unique event brings together leaders in the residential green building industry for two days of information sessions and networking, and to share best practices. The opening general session, "Growing Our New Housing Stock: A Discussion Across Multiple Sectors," features Kelli Home CIO, Jeff Meyer, Remodeler's House (including Sherry Todd Benson and "Remodeler Nation" host Steve Thomas).



For more information, visit [greenbuildexpo.org](http://greenbuildexpo.org)



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## This Old House HOMESCHOOLING



# Hardwood Floors 101

Your COMPLETE GUIDE to finding the best wood floor for your home

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**T**o ensure that you have good floors in your house, just knock on wood. Nothing rivals the way wood wears up a room, its classic good looks, or how long it lasts—qualities that earn it the distinction of being *This Old House's* favorite flooring.

Whether you're laying a wood floor in a new house or replacing one that's damaged beyond repair, there are dozens of species to pick from, including trusty domestics, such as oak and maple, and intriguing exotics, such as tamarind and acacia. You also have a choice of widths—be it rusticwide planks or traditional narrow strips—and stain colors, which allows you to tailor your floors to your house's style and decor. And thanks to modern adhesives, a wide variety of species are available as "engineered" boards. Made from a stable sandwich of veneers, rather than solid stock, engineered floors can go places where it wasn't practical to install wood before: over radiant-floor heating systems and concrete and in basements.

There's a lot to sort out before buying a wood floor. But with the help of this guide from the editors of *This Old House*, you'll learn what's best for your home and your budget. And once your floor is installed, whether by you or a trusted pro, you'll find easy-care and spruce-up tips that'll keep your wood floor looking great for many years to come.

Just read on for all you need to know about making a solid investment in your home.

#### WILDCOMING ENTRYWAYS

Its hardness makes oak ideal for high-traffic foyers. Right: Clear-coated white oak works with cream wall paint and a punchy stair runner for a serene color palette. On the cover: Stain gives red oak a rich hue.

#### FLOOR FAQs

- **What it costs:** From \$1.50 to \$8 per square foot, depending on wood thickness, species, and grade. Some prefinished solid-wood and engineered wood floors are DIY-friendly, but if you plan to hire a pro installer, tack on \$2 per square foot, minimum.
- **How it will hold up:** Some prefinished solid-wood boards come with a 50-year warranty. With regular care, though, any solid-wood floor can easily last twice that long. Mortarless on the finish for engineered wood ranges from 10 to 30 years.
- **How to maintain it:** Fight a finish's biggest enemy—abrasive dirt—by vacuuming regularly and laying runners and doormats near entries.
- **Where to install it:** Just about anywhere, except in areas prone to extreme humidity and standing water.

PHOTO: JAMES HARRIS FOR LUMBER LIQUIDATORS



**100 years**  
How long a solid-wood floor should last





# Which wood is right for you?

Now comes the hard part, finding the species and surface treatment to suit your style—and your wallet. This Old House helps you weigh the options.

Homes with wood floors sell faster than ones with carpet.

## → CLASSIC

Domestic woods come in a variety of colors, grain patterns, and hardnesses.

### Stained red oak

PRICE: \$3.30 per sq. ft.  
HIGHLIGHT: It's the most common wood-strip flooring in American homes.

### White ash

PRICE: \$5.60 per sq. ft.  
HIGHLIGHT: This bland wood has a prominent grain pattern.

### Heart pine

PRICE: \$4 per sq. ft.  
HIGHLIGHT: Rusty-bued and heavy, it's been in Southern homes since colonial times.

### Black cherry

PRICE: \$4.90 per sq. ft.  
HIGHLIGHT: Under a clear finish, its natural cinnamon tint darkens with age.



## → EXOTIC

Woods from the tropics are renowned for their rich colors and extreme hardness.

### Black acacia

PRICE: \$4.40 per sq. ft.  
HIGHLIGHT: This stained hardwood has a golden tone when topped just with a clear finish.

### Australian cypress

PRICE: \$5 per sq. ft.  
HIGHLIGHT: Its distinct grain and profusion of knots give dry rooms a rustic look.

### Brazilian lion

PRICE: \$5.90 per sq. ft.  
HIGHLIGHT: Dark chocolate and blond stripes alternate in an eye-catching combination.



## → DISTRESSED

Flooring with an aged look, from day one.

### Distressed hickory

PRICE: \$5.40 per sq. ft.  
HIGHLIGHT: Dented with chains, then stained to a rich hue.

### Handscrapped white oak

PRICE: \$4.60 per sq. ft.  
HIGHLIGHT: Random ripples are carved along the length of each strip.

PHOTOS: (THIS PAGE) TONYA HARRIS/REUTERS; (OPPOSITE PAGE) TONYA HARRIS/REUTERS; (THIS PAGE) TONYA HARRIS/REUTERS

## Installation day

Whether hiring a pro or doing it yourself, the experts at This Old House tell you what goes into a quality job.

**PREP THE BOARDS** Stack both solid and engineered flooring in the room where it will be installed so that air can circulate around each piece. Let the wood sit for a week to acclimate to its surroundings. Skip this step and it may cup or bow after it's installed.

**PREP THE SPACE** Clear out furniture and sweep the room. Fix any squeaks and bouncy areas. For nail- or staple-down flooring, cover the subfloor with a vapor retarder, such as asphalt-coated kraft paper. For floating and glue-down floors, fill low spots with leveling compound, then cover with a foam underlayment. Trim door casings so that the flooring can fit underneath.

**MIX IT UP** Go for a random layout by mixing long and short pieces so that there's no

discernible pattern. As a rule of thumb, stagger the ends of adjacent strips by at least 6 inches to prevent stain or sawtooth motifs.

**GATHER THE GEAR** Most floors require these essentials: a tape measure,



**READY, SET, NAIL!** A pneumatic floor nailer is the tool of choice for laying solid- and engineered-wood strips.

hammer, miter saw, prybar to coax tight fits, an undercutting saw to trim casings, shoe molding to hide the gap between baseboard and floor, and thresholds to handle transitions. To cut wide planks, use a circular saw. For nailed solid and engineered wood, also get a pneumatic roller, compressor, floor nails, asphalt-coated kraft paper, and wood putty, to cover exposed nailheads in the first and last courses.

For glue-down engineered wood, cork, and laminate, pick up flooring adhesive and a notched trowel.

For floating engineered wood, cork, and laminate, just get foam underlayment.

PHOTO: CRYSTAL/REXUS; ILLUSTRATION: JEFF STOKER



**SMOOTHING** A smoothing sander, such as this belt sander, is a must-have for all finished floors.

## Finishing options

Prefinished boards are good to go right out of the box. Bare wood has to be sanded, stained (if you choose to), and covered with top coats before you can move the furniture in. Here's what you need to know about finishes:

**Oil-based polyurethane** Long the gold standard for durability, it imparts an amber hue to wood. Wait 24 hours between coats and allow three days to cure.



**Water-based polyurethane** Goes on milky but quickly dries to form a crystal-clear finish. Two coats can be applied in one day. Virtually no odor. Give it three days to cure.

**Stain** Uses penetrating pigments to darken wood color and enhance its grain. Apply before the protective finish coats.

PHOTO: CRYSTAL/REXUS; ILLUSTRATION: JEFF STOKER

## How to find a pro

While some wood-floor types lend themselves well to DIY installation, a good flooring contractor can handle the heavy lifting and quickly solve problems that might crop up. **+ Get multiple bids.** Ask family and friends to recommend a pro. Some flooring retailers provide names of contractors who are certified to install their products. Call likely prospects and explain the scope of your project before meeting face to face to discuss details. Serious candidates will get back to you with detailed bids and also show proof of liability insurance and a business or contractor's license, if applicable in your area.

**+ Check references.** Call recent customers and check their work with your own eyes. Also, make sure the installer has a clean record with the local Better Business Bureau and your state's consumer protection agency. **+ Get it in writing.** A contract that details the materials to be used, payment schedules, and start and completion dates is your best protection against misunderstandings.

## Easy DIY floors

Stick 'em down or snap 'em together. These solid-wood alternatives will be ready for footsteps in a weekend.



**Learn how**  
Scroll by steps for installing engineered wood and cork flooring floors at [thisoldhouse.com/hardwood](http://thisoldhouse.com/hardwood)



### → ENGINEERED WOOD

The base is plywood, its top is a prefinished wood veneer. Strips can be fastened or glued down, or left to float.

**Engineered tamarind**  
PRICE: \$4.10 per sq. ft.  
HIGHLIGHT: Get the look of teak for about the same price as bamboo.

**Engineered black walnut**  
PRICE: \$4.70 per sq. ft.  
HIGHLIGHT: This naturally dark wood has been popular since Victorian times.

**Vertical strand bamboo**  
PRICE: \$3.00 per sq. ft.  
HIGHLIGHT: This grass, which reaches maturity in about six years, is an eco-friendly alternative to slow-growing trees.

**Woven strand bamboo**  
PRICE: \$4 per sq. ft.  
HIGHLIGHT: Weaving the strips together creates a flooring as hard as hickory.

**Engineered red oak**  
PRICE: \$3.25 per sq. ft.  
HIGHLIGHT: A classic, tough hardwood, just 1/4 inch thick.

PHOTOS: TOP BY PHIL WILSON; BOTTOM BY PHIL WILSON



### → CORK

Made from the bark of cork oak trees in Spain and Portugal, this click-together or glue-down flooring is soft underfoot, a natural insulator, and an excellent sound absorber.

**Cork plank**  
PRICE: \$3.80 per sq. ft.  
HIGHLIGHT: These 11-mm-thick planks snap together and float over the subfloor.

**Cork tile**  
PRICE: \$1.50 per sq. ft.  
HIGHLIGHT: Only 1/8 inch thick, this cork-crumbs amalgam is glued directly to the surface.

### → LAMINATE

It's a photo of wood, glued to a fiberboard substrate. These wide planks are a snap to install—literally—but once they're worn, they can't be refinished.

**"Cherry" laminate**  
PRICE: \$1 per sq. ft.  
HIGHLIGHT: These 1/2-inch-thick pieces click together.

**"Teak" laminate**  
PRICE: \$2.80 per sq. ft.  
HIGHLIGHT: Its unrelenting surface resembles a hand-scrapped wood floor.



PHOTOS: TOP BY PHIL WILSON; BOTTOM BY PHIL WILSON

# Protect your investment

Thus Old House's top tip for keeping your floors looking like new



**2. Stop dirt at the door.** Dirt stuck to the bottom of shoes is a finish-killer. To keep from tracking it in, place doormats at entries and tell people to take off their shoes, ban high heels and soccer cleats; they can dent floors.

**3. Prevent scratches.** Put felt pads on the bottom of furniture legs. Clip dogs' toenails.  
**3. Keep it clean.** Vacuum regularly. Follow up by mopping with a moist microfiber pad. Wipe up spills promptly to prevent water from warping boards or damaging the finish.



**4. Renew the finish.** Brighten a dull surface with a light sanding and fresh coats of polyurethane. Do this "screen-and-poly" every few years—consider setting up a

maintenance plan with a flooring pro—and you may never need to refinish.

**5. Beware of buildup.** Avoid cleaners that contain ammonia, vinegar, wax, polish, or oil soaps, any of which can dull or etch a top coat and cause refinishing problems down the road. Not sure what's in your cleaner? Do this test: Spray it on a window and let it dry. If it leaves a residue or an oily film, toss it.



**SAVE THE FINISH** Keep floors scratch-free by sticking felt pads to the bottom of furniture legs.

## Starting over

When a floor's finish is worn through or flaking off, it's time to sand it all off—and a bit of the wood—and apply a couple of fresh coats. You can do this yourself with a rented sander, but you risk disfiguring your floor. A good flooring contractor will have dust-free equipment and the refinishing know-how to get your floor looking their best, starting at \$2 per square foot.



## get the complete how-to

Find detailed step-by-step tips for floors and many more DIY fixes at [thisoldhouse.com/hardwood](http://thisoldhouse.com/hardwood)



## Five easy fixes

➤ **Silence squeaks.** Press on the offending board, then drill a 1/8-inch pilot hole at an angle through its face until you hit the subfloor. To prevent splitting, be sure to position the bit at the center of the board and at least 3 inches from either end. Continue to hold the board as you hammer a 6d finish nail into the hole. Recess the head using a nailset, and fill the divot with color-matched wood putty.

➤ **Hide scratches.** Touch them up as they occur using a stain-filled marker, sold at hardware stores.

➤ **Make stains disappear.** If moisture has discolored the wood, sand off the finish and scrub on a solution of hot water and oxalic acid powder, sold in hardware stores as wood bleach. Rinse three times with water. Once the stain is gone—it may take a few treatments—make sure the wood is dry before applying a new finish.

➤ **Spot refinishing.** Tape around the damaged board and sand with 80-grit paper until imperfections disappear. Sand again with 120-grit, then brush on two coats of polyurethane, allowing drying time between layers.

➤ **Fill open joints.** When big gaps open up between wide planks, stuff them with marine rope or no-lar oakum, a jute fiber used by plumbers.

# Floors to suit your style

Whether you choose solid wood, engineered wood, or cork, consider how color and graining come into play with the rest of the room's decor



**BAMBOO** This green flooring from Southwest Asia has a bright contemporary feel. 3 1/4-inch carbonized horizontal planks, similar to shown, \$3 per sq. ft.



**CORK** In a family room or den, this floating floor reduces noise and cushions footfalls. 12-inch wide click-together planks, similar to shown, \$4 per sq. ft.



**ENGINEERED BIRCH** Dark stained wood makes this small home office feel larger. 4 1/4-inch strips, similar to shown, \$4 per sq. ft.

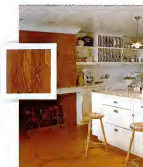
PHOTOS COURTESY OF LUMBER LIQUIDATORS. STYLING: JEFF CHASE. GRAPHIC DESIGN: KIMBERLY HARRIS. THE WALLS AND FURNITURE ARE NOT INCLUDED.



**WIDE KNOTTED PINE** Wide, knotty planks complement the rustic beadboard wall and ceiling paneling. 3 1/4-inch unfinished planks, similar to shown, \$1.70 per sq. ft.



**DISTRESSED HEART PINE** Handscrapped flooring adds character and patina to any room. 5-inch strips, similar to shown, \$5 per sq. ft.



**BRAZILIAN CHESTNUT** This dense exotic stands up nicely to traffic in busy kitchens. 3 1/4-inch strips, similar to shown, \$5.70 per sq. ft.

## FLOORING DIRECTORY

Boards from Lumber Liquidators, [www.lumberliquidators.com](http://www.lumberliquidators.com) or call 1-800-437-5866 to find stores near you. All are prefinished unless noted.

### Which would be right for you?

**(Classic)** Stained red oak, Gambark Oak, Cashin Oak, Black cherry, Select American Cherry, Bellerose White oak, Select Ash, Redwood, Heart pine, Charleston Chestnut Heart Pine, Caviar Line, Quarter Brazilian, engineered, Brazilian Redwood Select, Redwood, Australian eucalyptus, Australian Cypress, Bellerose, Brazilian Ironwood, Redwood Select, Redwood, Black oxide, Imperial Teak, Buffalo's Pride, Distressed Hickory, Distressed Hickory, Virginia Mill Works, Handscrapped white oak, Old World Oak Handscrapped, Virginia Mill Works.

### Easy DIY ideas

**(Engineered Wood)** Tamarind, Golden Teak, Carillon, Schott, Black walnut, Scottish Grove, American Walnut, Carillon, Schott, Vertical strand bamboo, Natural, Natural, Bamboo Quick Clic, Schott, Woven-strand bamboo, Qing Dynasty, Strand Bamboo, Morning Star, Red oak, Oak Engineered Select, Schott, (Oak) Plank, Oak Cork, Lullaby Cork, Tile, Sunset Cork, Lullaby Cork, (Lullaby) "Cherry", American Cherry, Lullaby, Utopia, Dream Home, "Teak", Imperial Teak, Lullaby, Hamilton Manor, Dream Home.

### Flavor the last year style

Bamboo, Handscrapped, Quartered Bamboo, Morning Star, Oak, Gambark Oak, Lullaby Cork, Engineered Oak, Bamboo Quick Clic, Oak, Schott, White pine, New England, Unfinished, Clover Lane, Distressed heart pine, Western Heart Pine, Virginia Mill Works, Brazilian chestnut, Brazilian Chestnut Select, Bellerose.

# Hardwood Flooring Deals!

## Reliable and Beautiful Engineered Flooring

Schön Engineered Floors are a perfect match for all areas of the home. Schön comes in a beautiful variety of exotic hardwood, domestic hardwood and bamboo.

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Engineered Floors

from \$1.99 sq.ft.

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Handcrafted workmanship from Colonial Homes can be found today in handscraped flooring by Virginia Mill Works.



from \$3.69 sq.ft.

Over 175 stores nationwide! For a FREE catalog or a store near you call 800-253-0503 or go to [lumberliquidators.com](http://lumberliquidators.com). Financing and installation available.

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BellaWood is not just beautiful, it's also practical. BellaWood's prefinished flooring comes with a 50-year warranty. Available in Exotic and Domestic Species.

**BellaWOOD**  
REFINISHED HARDWOOD FLOORS  
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from \$2.59 sq.ft.

## Going green?

Moring Star Bamboo Flooring creates a naturally beautiful and ecologically friendly product that evokes a feeling of luxury.



\$1.89 sq.ft.

HARDWOOD FLOORS FOR LESS!  
**LUMBER LIQUIDATORS**  
[www.lumberliquidators.com](http://www.lumberliquidators.com)  
1-800-HARDWOOD



## Build a recycling center

Create an outdoor waste-management shed with flip-open lids and easy-access bifold doors by [www.usgreenbuilding.com](http://www.usgreenbuilding.com) • Photograph by KOLLYR/ISTOCK

weekend remodel

**Cost:** \$500  
**Time:** 12 hours  
**Difficulty:** Difficult  
Angling cuts and lining up doors takes precision

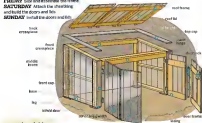
Waste management is a major part of your home's maintenance. A recycling center is a great way to keep your home organized and clutter-free. This project is a great way to build a recycling center that is both functional and aesthetically pleasing. The center is built with a metal frame and has a flip-open lid that allows you to access the interior without having to remove the lid. The center is also equipped with a bifold door that can be opened from the inside or the outside. This makes it easy to access the center without having to go outside. The center is built with a metal frame and has a flip-open lid that allows you to access the interior without having to remove the lid. The center is also equipped with a bifold door that can be opened from the inside or the outside. This makes it easy to access the center without having to go outside.



For complete instructions, turn the page

## Day-to-day timeline

**FREDDY** Saw and assemble the frame.  
**SATURDAY** Attach the sheathing and build the doors and lids.  
**SUNDAY** Install the doors and lids.



### tools you need

framing square  
 spirit square  
 square  
 drill/driver  
 hammer/wrenchset

### materials to buy

2x4s for the sheathing and build the roof.  
 Get seven 8-foot boards.  
 2x4 tongue-and-groove siding. If it is up, press it outward as close as you can before not using it. Get enough to cover about 75 square feet.  
 1x4s for the inside door frame. Get the door and lid. Get seven 8-foot boards.  
 Construction adhesive to glue the sheathing.  
 4-inch door hinges to attach each door to the frame. Get 30.  
 One screw (dressed) hinge to attach the build door. Get two 30-inch hinges.  
 30x1-inch stainless-steel deck screws.  
 2x4-inch stainless-steel deck screws.  
 2x4-inch stainless-steel deck screws.  
 2x4-inch stainless-steel deck screws.  
 2x4-inch stainless-steel deck screws.

### work quickly

To see full list of materials, go to [www.theresources.com](http://www.theresources.com).

1



## 1. Sides

### A. Size the framing.

- To sized compass up bottom 32-inch by 32-inch (2x4) faster wide by 32-inch (width) but you can adjust it for any size container by setting the container on its side and lay up the framing around it.
- For the base, cut a 2x4 to 30 inches with a saw.
- Set two 2x4s on the ground, parallel to each other and mark the distance between the base. Then set the legs of the side frame. Square up the corners. Mark the front leg at 42 inches from the base and the back leg at 40 inches.
- Lay another 2x4 across the legs at the marks. This represents the shed roof, which will have a 10-degree pitch to direct water away from the house. Transfer the angle to the legs.

### B. Cut the side framing pieces.

- Lay each leg on the flat. Adjust the blade of a plane to match the angle marked on the leg edges. Cut the legs to length. This angle.
- Cut the legs.
- While the legs lie on the ground, in the original position, cut a 3x4 long leg piece to 80 inches. This is a middle piece.
- Place a 2x4 across the top of the legs to represent the top of the frame. But wait: you will be using a 2x4 over the top of the legs. Identify the 2x4 to lengthen the outside of the assembled framing every 32 inches. Square the corners. Mark the angle. Cut the 2x4 at these angles.
- Screw the base, legs, and middle brace together with 30x1-inch deck screws. Attach the top of the 2x4 to the back and wrap over at the front.
- Duplicate this framing assembly for the other side of the shed.

## 2. Front

### A. Build supports for the front.

- Position a 40-inch long 2x4 in front of each front leg on both side frames. Push the side bottom of the base. The gap at the top between the two 2x4s is the gap that will extend the two 2x4s. Secure the 2x4s to the legs with 2x4-inch deck screws.
- Install the front creosole.
- Cut a 2x4 to 80 inches (the shed's inside width plus the 2 inches of framing on the sides). Stand the 2x4 on its edge and use the 2x4 to the gap above the supports. Secure the creosole in place and using 2x4-inch deck screws.



## 3. Additional supports

### B. Build the back creosole supports.

- To follow the pitch of the roof, the back creosole should be cut inside the side frames. To secure the angle supports, lay it on, place a 2x4 on edge on the ground and extend a 2x4 on top of it. Then mark the angle of the support on the 2x4. The support is supported by the 2x4 on the ground. Cut the 2x4 at this angle at the rear. Make a second support for the other side.
- Secure the support. Push the 2x4 into the base inside the side frames using 2x4-inch deck screws.
- Install the back creosole.
- Cut two 80-inch long 2x4s. Glue and screw them together with construction adhesive and 2x4-inch deck screws to make the back creosole.
- Set the back creosole on edge on top of the angled support legs and fasten with the roofing. Secure it with 2x4-inch deck screws angled up through the supports.
- Create a lid support.
- Secure the 80-inch long 2x4 on top of the front creosole and fasten with 2x4-inch deck screws. This piece will act as a hinge for the lid top and is on an



**Tip** When measuring framing, place a 2x4 in a defined square, such as the back creosole and lid support, mark the lumber by holding it up to the place rather than relying on a tape measure. The fit will be more accurate that way.



4

**Tip:** If you're having trouble sliding the sheath between tongue-and-groove boards, take a scrap of the material, slide the groove over the tongue of the piece you're trying to fit, and tap the scrap. This prevents the tongue of the installed board from being damaged by the hammer's blow.



## 4. Sheathing

### A. Attach the first piece of sheathing

• Remove the base of the ground or the first stone pavers, or lift out the wooden floor joists and use foam insulation with water. Then the frame of the front porch enclosure and the back of the house.

• To secure the frame, measure the side of the frame from corner to opposite corner in both directions. If one measurement is longer, push the corners closer together until the measurements are equal.

• So that you don't end up with a river of siding on your first piece, dry fit the pieces of siding, across the side and adjust them until the two pieces are relatively even. Mark a place to finish the space closest to the house.

• Fit the first piece down below on the groove side. Set the cutoff strip on the ground along the base of the side frame and rest the siding on it. If you should the stud. That will serve as your guide bottom of the sheet to keep water from working under siding.

• Hold the cut edge of the first piece against the house, with the base of the board resting on the cutoff strip on the ground. Mark the top edge of the board and the bottom of the work.

• Apply construction adhesive to the frame, and press the first board in place on the adhesive. Nail first on angle through the inner edge of the tongue and into the framing, using 1 1/2-inch stainless steel siding nails. Sink the nails with a nailer.

### B. Finish siding the frame

• Apply more adhesive to the next part of the frame. Slide the second board in place over the tongue of the first board and make a space through the tongue to let the rest of the board fit in by leaving the space above the roofline.

• Mark the working of the last board to the face of the frame, and fit the board to the last 4 or 5 pieces through the frame, and work into the surface.

• Sheathe the other side of the shed in the same manner.

### C. Trim off the excess sheathing

• Using a reciprocating saw, trim the excess sheathing flush with the roofline and back of the shed.

• Remove the space below the sheathing.



5



**Tip:** When hanging a door, its top outside corner contains a built-in hinge. This will allow all the balance of the door enough to make it move freely to swing closed when left unattended.

## 5. Lids and doors

### A. Assemble the doors and lids

• Because the framing pieces for the roof lids are not screwed to one another, the roof to be used is the same, then use a 2x4 and 2x6 to cut the siding in several places. For this you need a 2x4, a 2x6, and a 2x8. The 2x4 and 2x6 are used to secure the 2x8. Screw the 2x4 to each other along the corner of your work surface to act as the first stage.

• In the case of building separate lids, build one solid roof and cut it in three. Cut two 2x4 boards to 80 inches and lay them parallel and against the studs. Between these two 2x4s, use 2x6s to lay down boards to 20 inches. Screw the 2x4s to the studs, tight against the studs. To complete the top.

• Cut enough siding boards to fit across the frame, making them 37 inches long. As with the siding, sink the pieces. Make sure the pieces are close to the frame and the frame is tight.

• Fit the first board down to sit on the groove side. Starting at the left side, glue and nail the board to the frame with the tongue facing to the right and the bottom edge flush with the frame.

• Push the rest of the roof sheathing in the same manner as the first. Press, nail the lid board.

• Fit the roof over. Screw 2 1/2-inch deck screws through the framing and into the sheathing for additional strength. Measure and mark a line along the center of each of the two inside framing pieces. Using a square, cut the roof into three parts to create two masks.

• Build the doors in the same manner as the roof. Start with building boards to 80 inches. Separate them with five boards cut to 27 inches. Create a new jig for this frame. Sheathe it with boards cut to 80 inches from the ground to the underside of the roof. When the 2x4s are in place, create the doors.

### B. Attach the caps and lids

• Flip over the siding boards to cap the exposed framing at the front of the shed frame, sheathing (if used) or base of the back enclosure, and on the sides of the roof framing. Glue and nail the front caps before attaching the top caps.

• Install two 4-inch door hinges in the top edge of each of the thresholds. Set each door in place and install the hinges through the back enclosure.

• Install the front doors.

• Install a 30-inch door hinge between the sides of doors, inside the door in the framing. First, use a 2x4 board on a scrap piece of siding as you attach it to the inside edge of the opening, thus leaving a 1/2-inch gap at the base. Use two 4-inch door hinges each side.

• Attach a 2x4 board near the top of each door framing with a single 2x4-inch screw. When the doors are closed, the lids to spin these boards behind the front enclosure and lock the doors.

see how  
it's done  
with video  
of this weekend  
project at  
diyweekend.com/video







to the house," as Sean puts it.

Once they were ready to dig in, the first order of business was to divert that canal. "There was a lot of engineering the land," says Gregory. "We were lucky to find a septic area with a backhoe." A landscape crew dug a French drain to send water away from the house to the side yard and topped the expanded area with a bluestone patio. Then another crew had to lift up the back of the house long enough to get under it and repair the foundation. "We had to work from the outside so that the house could live another 150 years," says Gregory.

When it was finally time to think about the front, Sean and Gregory's lack of interest in finding local contractor David Wysocky, known for his work on antique houses, Sean had made a rough sketch to guide Wysocky, drawing the bodge-podge facade a more unified, symmetrical look with new two-over-two windows and a wide, deep porch topped with standing stone masonry. After jacking up the front to balance the original stone foundation, Wysocky worked his way around, replacing asbestos siding with painted cedar and double windows with energy-efficient models. He built a deck on one side of the house, a shed entrance on the other, and a stone-colored porch to frame the off-center door over front.

Today there's no sight more gratifying than driving up and seeing the transformed cottage, says Gregory. And with a porch, a deck, and a patio all bugging the house, there's a vantage point to enjoy the outdoors, whatever the weather. "Whether it's a sunny day or a night of rain or snow is coming down, we can sit outside and watch it all and enjoy."

#### the porch

The old wooden deck porch was tight on space (top left). The new one is 2 feet deeper and built right onto a deck on the chimney side. The same green-paint color is standard and finished out on the...



[before]



[before]



#### The Front

A new porch with seven square transomed columns frames the front door, giving the facade a more unified, symmetrical look. It leads directly onto a deck on the chimney side.

#### the main entry

The old entry had a basement look (top left). It gained an eye-catching sight with a new two-over-two porch door and wide steps with recycled blue stone treads. Screens on either side of the door help soften the doorway established by the porch off-building screen columns. Door: Jeld-Wen, Shaker, 10003.



#### The Chimney Side

Part of a circa 1940s porch addition, the chimney side of the house had a rudimentary look. Today it opens onto a deck that leads the eye—and visitors—to a bath garden.



[before]



[before]



#### a windows, doors & decking

The chimney was festooned by porch windows (top left). The owners changed out the view at the front, too, for single French doors that lead from the living room to the new deck. The added glass also makes the house feel larger by opening up the view from inside. The house is situated in a wooded area, so the new porch floor windows encourage the outside view to flow around the house and through the trees.



#### a stone veneer & steel cables

To tie the new chimney (top left) into the house, the owners added a stone veneer (top right). Put up with a rustic stone veneer, the look of the stone veneer foundation. The view is rough, rustic stone veneer with the steel cable balustrade capped with a solid red cedar railing with a stainless steel cap. Screen the deck with the new stone veneer, and steel to enhance the look of the house. Stone veneer: StoneCraft Industries. Metal: Lyle.

choose the right windows  
Gregory and Sean had a lot of choices when it came to windows. They chose the right windows for the house.



## The Back

Toadstool marbles away from the house, the lead was regraded to flatten it out and a French drain was dug to funnel runoff to the side yard. A blue-slate patio and grassy lawn now cover the rocky soil.



- built on double-hung & a stone patio

Small ornaments and a big picture window on the first floor (REPORT) were replaced with bands of double hungs to match those elsewhere on the house. The catchall space in back became a welcoming gathering spot with a blue-toned tile floor, a new fireplace, built-in benches in with around.



1000



### The Side Entry

The proportions of the house came into alignment with the help of a larger entry on the west side. Its door, unlike the others, was not front, the rest of the matches the porch.



**Other entrance:**

Thanks to sole entry, great for food storage, looked like an afterthought (6/1/04)  
 12 metal roof replacement occurred with bare light that drew attention to the new higher gable. The parallel door opens showing rigid basement stairs carved from solid aluminum  
 Door, Jeff White, David Zemanoff



1. **Introduction**



### Tips from an old-house pro

"My goal is a happy medium between structure and aesthetics," says contractor David Wynkoop, a veteran remodeler of antique houses. "You want to make the house more livable, but you don't want to lose the charm." Here, his ideas for saving time, trouble—and money.

**1** Salvage what you can. "Old windows may not be worth saving and you can find reasonably priced new ones that do (reach more energy-efficient) and still have narrow profiles. But I always try to find and reuse sills down on the inside. It's harder to secure an exterior door but it can be done—just make sure it's going to fit right!"

**2** Let the factory do the work. 'Order cedar or pine siding preprimed if you can—and make sure it's backprimed, too. It's worth the extra money and that way you won't have to worry about side-damage while you take your time choosing paint colors. Calboard stone veneer is another time- and money-saver. It's lightweight and easy to work with. You can put it up with thinset.'

**3** Use bricks to trick the eye. To disguise a new-cement-blocker poured-concrete foundation, I'll put a step, or brick ledge, in it so that I can go back and add a stacked-stone face at ground level. And there's nothing like a nice long, dried peach to add the flavor of an old house. It also "sweat-draws" a high crack. You can really see the effect when you look at Sean and Greg's house, which is sitting on a rise. That low second window is what makes the house look so inviting. ■



# 100 DIY UPGRADES FOR UNDER \$100

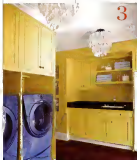
Invest a little and get a big improvement in how your home looks and feels. The editors at This Old House give you their top tips

**1** Add carved corbels under your breakfast bar. Chalk-painted parlor Victorian sconces with jumbo Two 20-inch-high-by-12-inch-deep Queen Anne-style corbels. **\$65**, capitalliving.com

**2** Plant evergreen screens on the north side of your house to block winter winds. Arborvitae Green Giant, conceals 3 feet in one year. **\$52** for two; jacksonnurseries.com

the newly Polished Bronze. Affordably frolics. **\$8** each; krobbsandwinke.com

**5** Fit an undermount sink with a matching hood for more prep space. Measure the length and width at the base, adding 1/4 inch to each side. Trim a piece of butcher block to size with a jigsaw. Then create a lip around its underside so that it will lock on the edge of the counter. 36 by 32-inch maple block. **\$86**, butcherblock.com



**3** Hang a slide bar in the laundry room for a bit of sophistication when unexpected pieces. White-Capit pendant with cord let, similar to shown above. **\$60**, worldmarket.com

**4** Mail-count a row of hooks above your kitchen counter to keep dish towels and cleaning cups at

**6** Display your first-season TV on a tabletop easel with adjustable clamps. Academy Deluxe Table Top Easel. **\$80**; melissaworkshop.com

**7** Wallpaper a door. Use paper and paste left over from a big job to dress up door panels, landing stiles and rails from the decoration. For sleek doors, trim a shape on the

back of the paper, cut it out and center it on the door. **No cost**

**8** Hang natural fiber shades to highlight the best window views and outdoors and help insulate windows. 33 by 72-inch Denim/Flower Shade similar to shown right. **\$26**; target.com

**9** Turn a closet into a home office. Unhang the door and load hanging rods for shelves—a deep one for the desktop and two shallow ones above for storage. One 20 by 24 by 1/4 inch and two 12 by 24 by 1/4 inch white-oak laminate shelves, metal stands, and shelf brackets. **\$89**; Eto. **\$68**, containerstore.com

**10** Preserve the doors on a bank of upper cabinets, then paint the interiors for instant open shelving. 3 gallon of Elements Zero VOC 100-percent acrylic paint with a washable semigloss sheen. **\$35**; californiagapaints.com

**11** Create cubbies in a bookcase. Cut vertical dividers to the depth of the unit minus 1/4 inch, and secure them together with glue and finishing nails. Face dividers with 3/4-inch-thick with the shelf boards. One sheet of 1/4-inch plywood and three 3/4-inch. **\$28**; homedepot.com

**12** Install a new doorknob. The lighted Volvo® button shown at right will impress your guests. **\$70**; in.premier.com



**13** Polish up an entry hall with a dirt-puddling doormat to protect the fresh in wood floors. Chalkwash even vinyl mats with out in the sink. **\$50**; crateandbarrel.com

**14** Flack your walls with matching pendant lights to open up space on end tables. Two Eden pendant lamps with drum-style fabric shades. **\$99**; 902.102.com

**15** Throw down luxury hardware. 8 ounce bottle of Brisa Hanging Solution. **\$7**; containerstore.com

**16** Add a shelf above a doorway. Paint it to match the trim. Use wall it to display pottery. 40-inch-long 1/4-inch-thick shelf and two 7-inch Classic Oak brackets. **\$32**; rockler.com

**17** Build in a soap dispenser beside the kitchen faucet to keep that Petrievic bottle out of sight. Whitehaus® Deluxe Soap Station Dispenser in polished nickel. **\$90**; kitchenresources.com



**12** Add a doorknob





51  
L.A. WHITE  
AN WHITE

overnight. By morning, the paint will be filling up the metal. About \$5 for the pot.

**45 Dried flower bouquets** are beautiful. Arts and Crafts, 20% to 30% less priced ceramic tiles. Shown below. \$14 each; creative.com



45  
Add eye-catching house numbers.

**46 Top your newel with a carved wood finial** for a room of rich elegance. Antique Ivory/White Post Finial \$66; ivygray.com

**47 Create a luxe look** with stone-look limestone flooring in a 4-inch-wide marble door.

threshold supported by decorative metal brackets. 26-inch-long threshold, about \$20, at most flooring retailers. Two-liter Pennsylvania Dutch Mold 3-1/2 by 4-inch cast iron brackets. \$13; hush.co

**48 Turn out old cages** as your tables. Minimize the brackets and paint the frames white. 1 gallon of white paint, sandpaper, wood putty to fill back holes. (part of kit and 1 gallon of clear polyurethane. \$55; home.com

**49 Add a stained-glass window to your bath.** If you're tired of a window to replace your existing window, simply hang one from chains in front of it. eBay store DaliaAntique Mail has Art Deco windows similar to shown. About \$400; ebay.com

**50 Refresh a dull mirror** frame with glossy paint for an upscale look. 13 canisters of Minwax General Lacquer Dream! \$46; pordocolor.com

**51 Put casters on a table** for a dual purpose: dining and food prep surface. The small kitchen. Four casters with brakes, similar to shown at left. \$15; lewiscost.com

**52 Install your fireplace** on a sliding with a screen made from salvaged screen without frame. Get one that is slightly larger than your fireplace opening so that you can secure it to the surround. Add hook anchors to hold potter's blooms. One 50-inch-wide-by-36-inch-tall hot set screen and screen. \$15; lewiscost.com

**53 Brighten counter tops** with a bright white paint. \$15; lewiscost.com. Ace Hardware has. \$9 each; acehardware.com

**54 Brighten counter tops** with a bright white paint. \$15; lewiscost.com. Ace Hardware has. \$9 each; acehardware.com

54

**54 Make a wall of tiles** from wood glue. Use a spade bit to bore a recess in the top for the glue. One spade bit, one spade bit, one spade bit. \$15; lewiscost.com

**55 Use a small table** between furniture by painting it the same hue. 1 gallon of red-friendly paint. \$15; lewiscost.com

**56 Get a new look** with a new look. \$15; lewiscost.com. Ace Hardware has. \$9 each; acehardware.com

**57 Shop small prints** and hang them together for the look of large, expensive pieces of art. Arrange the display.



49



69  
Part one  
handles on  
your door

on the floor. \$15; lewiscost.com

**58 Paint a low-growing** English ivy plant to prevent weeds from spreading below your porch. Add a low-growing ivy plant so that they'll protect the temperature rise. 400-wood pecker. \$2; lewiscost.com

**59 Brush on a welcome mat.** Mix the dried, patterned rug with a mat (below) on your door by wrapping the design with painter's tape and a roller. Top coat with a clear coat. \$15; lewiscost.com



69  
Part one  
handles on  
your door

**60 Change the hardware** on your kitchen island. Use a small, ornate metal object, possibly a door handle or knob. \$15; lewiscost.com

where above. \$25 for handle with package. com

**61 Use a night light** along the bathroom vanity to help for a soft, ambient night light. SuperBright 12-volt strand. \$4; lewiscost.com

**62 Build a wall-mounted wooden table** with wood carvings to display a stone road sign. Two 6-inch oak. \$15; lewiscost.com

**63 Create a new look** with a new look. \$15; lewiscost.com. Ace Hardware has. \$9 each; acehardware.com

**64 Top stock kitchen cabinets with crown molding** for the look of custom cabinets. 32 feet of crown to trim out the overhang. \$15; lewiscost.com

**65 Mount a new mirror** by your front door. A half-colored looking model will make your entry more eye-catching—and protect your privacy. Priority Mirror. \$15; lewiscost.com

**66 Use a bit of paint** to create a new look. \$15; lewiscost.com

Victorian style cast iron decorative brackets will add 10 windows in first floor rooms, where guests are more likely to see them. \$80; hush.co

**67 Paint your porch** with a new look. \$15; lewiscost.com

**68 Paint a new look** with a new look. \$15; lewiscost.com

**69 Create a new look** with a new look. \$15; lewiscost.com

**70 Create a new look** with a new look. \$15; lewiscost.com

**71 Create a new look** with a new look. \$15; lewiscost.com

**72 Create a new look** with a new look. \$15; lewiscost.com

**69 Give one wall** a new look. \$15; lewiscost.com

**70 Create a new look** with a new look. \$15; lewiscost.com

**71 Create a new look** with a new look. \$15; lewiscost.com

**72 Create a new look** with a new look. \$15; lewiscost.com

**73 Create a new look** with a new look. \$15; lewiscost.com

**74 Create a new look** with a new look. \$15; lewiscost.com

**75 Create a new look** with a new look. \$15; lewiscost.com



67  
Part one  
handles on  
your door

Part one  
handles on  
your door

Part one  
handles on  
your door



There were  
bullets in  
the siding  
and bars on  
the windows

Burn, the house had seen tough times. But one determined couple saw past the deteriorating shell and, using a mix of salvaged materials and sweat equity, breathed new life into the 1931 bungalow.



I wanted to buy this house from the first time I laid eyes on it, back in 1994. It was just so sad looking. I thought, I need to fix it up.

The 1911 Hampton was one of three vintage houses that sat in a row on the same block in the Kirkwood neighborhood of Atlanta, Georgia. While the area was starting to revitalize, the house bore the marks of its rough-rope history. Iron bars secured the living room windows, and bullets were lodged in the side. We learned at the closing that two people had been murdered on the site.

But the owner, who showed up every three months to mow the lawn, refused to sell, though he seemed a just man in five years. So my partner, Paula Rose, and I settled for the house next door, where we had our daughter, Walker. We

By KARA CRIBBS,  
Bismarckian  
Photography by  
Deborah Whittle  
Llewellyn  
Styling by  
Brian Carter



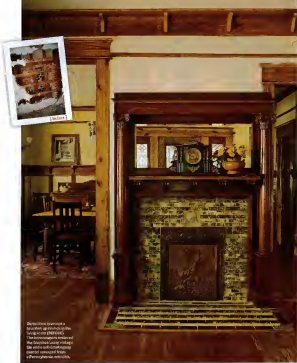
100

**Left:** When the house was split into three apartments, one of the bedrooms was then named after the back porch (probably new) the size of the new larger kitchen. Inspired by Greene and Greene designs, the cabinets were rolled out of old oak like John's conference table with walnut on the handles and drawer sides. The present, 100-year-old though it's as good as new, having been stored continuously.

**Opposite:** even  
burns subjugated  
the living street—a  
bank of sidewalks—a  
conductor of urban  
drive-bys and  
reflections were  
common. (JULY 2012)  
Hinterland, Kari  
O'Brien stands  
one in the dozen  
jettison doors  
she reflected her  
the tourist







Discussions featured a host of speakers in the living room (INFOCUS). The homogeneity of the village, the frequency of visits, the entire neighborhood, shared values and traditions, a sense of community.

**Above:** Quarternary talus unique with a unique "fig" grain and chambered drizzling from the mother hull on the top floor. It was salvaged from a late 1800s Tanager collection.

unique stained glass from Ohio, a 19th-century Edison light from Virginia, and an 1890s pink granite sink. "When we bought the ground, salvaged mahogany started for the living room fireplace that we uncovered under drywall. I knew I had to move in. Somehow, I persuaded Paula. I mean, how difficult could it be to move east then?"

Well, it was horrible. We immediately got a great offer on our house that we couldn't turn down. Then I realized, *Uh-oh!* The new house isn't ready. For a few weeks, we packed out two lifetime baskets, three cats, and 6-year-old daughter into one of our rental properties. But thanks to that time loss confined and moved in a few weeks only.

We had no choice but to move into a still-unfinished house that had power to only two outlets but lots of my insulation. With one of Atlanta's worst heat waves coming through that summer, the house was an inferno.

Even with all the windows thrown open and battery-powered fans going, the outside air was cooler than the inside—and it was 11.1 degrees outside. This went on for four weeks, until we passed our stink inspection and could run the criminal air conditioning. We didn't have the budget for more store monitors, but we didn't care. Washing dishes in the tub was no big deal after that misery.

That's not to say life was suddenly comfortable. It had been a while since I'd lived through a remodel. But after spending a few months in our own dirty, noisy, chaotic construction site, with all our belongings holed up there,

A photograph of a bathroom with a blue and white color scheme. The walls are painted blue, and the ceiling is white. A white bathtub is visible, along with a toilet and a sink. A window with a white frame is above the tub. A red towel hangs on the wall.

**ABOVE:** The new fuel tank in the dormer sits in both was original to the house. Replaced from the second floor and refinished. Everts' new marble basket, where the surround is by lined marble wainscot. A salvaged stained glass window is in light wood, comprising privacy.

a last great sympathy for our efforts.

The lender turned out to be a puzzled but ultimately understanding person. It was actually ambitious, even if it involved installing 100-year-old oak floor joists with wet-set screws into new, hand-laid rafters. Several extensions and delays just couldn't do it, either, others quipped at a point that would have been accepted as a luxury car. We finally hired someone who was experienced as custom cabinetry and learned a lot in the process. Halfway through, most of us were happy, so we found a custom-maker who said he'd find a challenge. He learned to drive, and now we work with him often.

We try to make ourselves with each project, but now, two years later, we still think it would be very hard to top this kitchen. That's how much we love and appreciate it.

We can't really imagine living anywhere else. Despite all the obstacles thrown our way during the remodel, we would do it all over again—if we had to. ■



## Our cast of veteran experts

Mike Davis  
General ContractorNorman Lissner  
Window CarpenterMichael Ebert  
Planning and Healing ExpertRoger Cook  
Landscape DesignerKevin S. Connor  
Nail

## Can I mulch my flower beds with oak leaves? Some people tell me they're too acidic.

—ROBERT JACOB, EYE HILL



Roger Cook says you can mulch with oak leaves, suggesting here you'll enjoy added soil acidity.

Roger Cook replies Oak leaf mulch is great for flower beds. It's a little acidic, but a lot of plants—including rhododendrons, azaleas, and holly—prefer that, so I wouldn't hesitate to put it over those beds. The effect of mulch on soil pH is negligible anyway, so other flowering plants won't really mind the leaves.

However, if your soil already tends to be on the acidic side, and you don't want to make it more so, have the soil tested to determine its pH level. If the soil has a low pH and the plants in your garden prefer it to be higher, mix in some lime before you add the oak leaves or mulch. Add only enough lime to balance the soil; the lab that does the testing will give you recommendations.

### FROSTY WINDOWS

Although we have double-hung, double-glazed windows, frost never formed on the inside surface of the metal-framed storm windows. Is there any way to prevent this?

—JIM AND MON SAREY, RIBOLI, ILL.

Tom Silva replies I'm glad you two are thinking ahead. The best time to solve weatherization problems is before the weather turns cold.

The reason that frost forms on the inside of your storm windows is that warm, moist air from the house

is leaking past the double-hung, then freezing on the frame's cold metal frames. Here's what to do to reduce or stop this problem.

First, make sure the weatherstripping on your double-hung is in good condition. If it isn't, replace it so that you have a tight seal around each sash.

Next, when winter arrives, lock your windows securely. Each lock acts as a gasket, so when they lock together at the meeting ends and push the top sash up and the bottom sash down, closing any air gaps.

Also, take steps to reduce indoor moisture levels by using exhaust fans when bathing and cooking. And as your climate, I'd consider keeping exterior storm windows. The ones I've used, made by Insulglass Window Systems, are barely noticeable but do a great job of stopping air movement, not to mention reducing heating costs.

One last thing: Check the bases of the storm where they meet the window's frame. They should be free of cracks and have well-constructed weep holes so that any frost that forms has a way to drain out where it drains. Without that drainage, your sills could rot.

### Q HOW TO REVIVE CABINET FINISHES

Our 20-year-old kitchen cabinets are stained maple with a clear finish. The finish on several doors, especially the ones above the sink and pot filler, has turned dull. Can it be restored?

—WILLIE MAE KATHE, CHERRY PITTSBURGH

Norm Ableson replies This is a common problem in kitchens. When you wash dishes or mop the floor, water, steam, moist vapors and condensation on the cabinets above. Both polyurethane and catalyzed lacquer finishes, which are widely used today on cabinets, cure dull when repeatedly exposed to moisture. Cullum's Kitchen is an excellent resource for finding finishes

because they fit so conveniently under the upper cabinets, right where hot steam will do the most damage.

Repping a finish is easy if it's still intact. Just clean the door thoroughly with acetone or spirits, then seal it lightly with 233-grit paper. Vacuum off the dust, and brush it at least two coats of a gloss, oil-based polyurethane. Be sure to ventilate the area well. If the dry finish is rough, sand it with steel wool—grade 0000, super fine—until its grain matches the rest of the cabinets.

But if the top finish is gone and the stain is damaged, prying a good match will be more difficult. First, try applying fresh topcoats of polyurethane, as above. You may be lucky and find that the color differences aren't that noticeable. But if the wooden stain bleeds, you could either order new doors or take them to a professional furniture refinisher, who'll know just what it takes to get back their original color and sheen.

### Q CAMOUFLAGE FOR HOLES IN BRICK WALLS

Over the years, as loose mortar and other debris have been dislodged and removed from the brick around the outside of my house, the number of small holes has grown. What's the best way to patch these holes so that they don't look so obvious?

—HENRIK ECKST, HAGERSTOWN, MD

Tom Silva replies You can fill those holes with a colored acrylic caulk that's close to the color of your brick. But to get an exact match, try this trick:

Drill a shallow hole in one of your bricks or an inconspicuous spot using a 1/4-inch masonry bit. Collect the dust. Now just dab some colored acrylic caulk into each hole—I like to use a clear polyurethane—then immediately press the dust onto the caulk's sticky surface. What's the result? The patches will be nearly invisible.



A-1 RoadSealer

B-1 HeavySeal for ledgers

C-1 Patching mortar

D-1 Dr...

E-1 Dr...



No Residue Duct Tape  
ScotchTough Tape



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WHAT IS IT?

**D-1 SPLIT-AND-SPICE CONNECTOR** These predrilled pieces of wood join metal or solid connections between round joists and flat-sided lumber—useful when building exterior fireplaces and porches. \$4.62, [www.homedepot.com](http://www.homedepot.com)

#### Q DYING ARBORVITAE

About five years ago, we planted a row of arbovitae in a raised bed. We caught two of them each winter, but last winter we lost so many, in fact, anything we can do to prevent them from dying?

—MICHAEL FREEDMAN, CLINTON TOWNSHIP, MD

**Roger Cook replies:** Arborvitae are usually just a basic bulletproof, but they're not immune. In winter, I've seen them get root rot, but this isn't usually an issue in raised beds, where underdraining is the most common problem. Once a bed breeder rots, the roots can't take up any moisture, which means winter winds can dry them out to the point of killing them.

So try this: Set up drip-irrigation lines or a soaker hose and give the trees a good long drink once or twice a week from October until the ground

frees. Cover the soil inside beds with a 2- or 3-inch thick layer of pine bark mulch, but keep it 6 to 8 inches away from the trunks. This will help hold in soil moisture and prevent the roots from drying out.

Finally, spray the stems with an anti-transpirant, such as *Wilt-Pruf*. This clear, polymer coating reduces the amount of moisture a plant loses during the winter, particularly when it's windy. Make sure the product is labeled for use on evergreens and that it's applied at the right time. Generally, you want to spray these shrubs early in winter and again in January, whenever daytime temperatures rise above freezing.

If you don't want to bother with anti-transpirant, wrap each shrub with burlap before winter sets in. Or protect the entire group with a windscreen made of burlap stretched between wooden stakes.



Arbovitae like this one will work with hot-water baseboards as long as the coating is compatible with the controlling heater.

#### THERMOSTATS FOR BASEBOARD HEAT

I've heard that programmable thermostats aren't recommended for hot-water baseboard heating systems. Is that true?

—STANLEY/LANT FRANKLIN, COLO.

**Richard Trethewey replies:** Not anymore. A number of manufacturers make programmable thermostats—the kind that automatically turn the temperature down at night and up in the morning—that are compatible with hot-water hydronic systems. The key is to get a thermostat that works with your boiler's kind of wiring. A good heating contractor who's been for weeks should be able to tell you what your system is.

Keep in mind that a boiler-based system won't respond as quickly as a forced-hot-air furnace when the temperature in your house changes. You'll probably have to set the thermostat to turn itself down at least an hour before you want a noticeable drop in temperature at night. Likewise, in the thermostat to turn up the heat at least an hour before you get up in the morning. You may have to fiddle with the timing a few times before you determine how long it takes for your house to heat up and cool down.

By the way, these thermostats are not a good match with hydronic radiators or floor-heating systems, which take even longer to warm up and cool down than baseboards.

It's generally not worth programming a thermostat to raise and lower base temperatures on a daily basis.

#### FIX FOR A LEAKING RETAINING WALL

Our retaining wall was built in the late 1920s by one of the first doctors in town, so it has some historical value. Now parts of it are leaking. What can we do to save it?

—JAN PORTER, SPRING GROVE, WIS.

**Roger Cook replies:** It's possible that there is a way to patch a wall back in place without damaging the stone joints, but I'm not aware of it. And even if it could be done, it would probably be pretty costly. My guess is that the leaking portions of the wall will have to be dismantled and rebuilt by an experienced mason, after the soil has been excavated behind it.

Now, if you really want to keep the wall as its historical condition, each stone should be numbered and photographed before the work starts so that it can be put back in the same position. Be sure to get close-up shots as well as overall shots. You should also have the old mason analyzed so that the new wall will match the old in color and consistency.

But if history is less important than your budget, the stones can simply be removed, cleaned, and reassembled in a pattern that closely matches the existing wall.

Either way, the wall should have a thick coating of fully trapped crushed stone with proper drainage at its base—a perforated PVC pipe wrapped in filter fabric and buried in crushed stone should do the trick. Once rebuilt on its new footing, your wall should last at least another 100 years.

send your questions to ask@thisoldhouse.com

go to [thisoldhouse.com/asktoth](http://thisoldhouse.com/asktoth) or write to Ask This Old House, This Old House magazine, 175 West 100th Street, New York, NY 10023

Illustration is a composite of photos and digital photos provided. Published questions reflect what the editors thought best. Because of time and space constraints, not all questions can be included.

He's a tough guy. But you can see right through him.



Transparent Duct Tape  
ScotchToughTape.com



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## My Style

**Elmira Stove Works**  
For true originals

Adorned with your choice of nickel, copper, or brass, each custom built Elmira Stove Works appliance is built to last, while offering the performance and features found in the most modern kitchen appliances. Elmira Stove Works sets the standard for superior quality design and construction. Let us build your new day.

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## Ask The Designer

KILZ  
FOR THE  
KILZ



Lisa LaForte  
Host and designer for HGTV

**Q** How can I creatively update my bedroom in an environmentally responsible way?

**A** A great way to inspire creativity in design is to imagine your home as an evolving environment. Take an active role in your room's décor by selecting paint colors that speak to you, whether they are bold and bright or neutral basics. Opt in by using a zero VOC\* and low-odor primer like KILZ Clean Start® and finish with a high quality paint for the most professional-looking finish.\*



For more information, visit  
[www.KILZPaint.com](http://www.KILZPaint.com) or call  
1-866-6-PRIMER-1 (866-674-6376)

\*KILZ is not a sealant or filler. For proper paint adhesion, follow

## ask this old house

READER  
TOOL  
TEST

### Electric leaf blowers

Modern electric leaf blowers handle the dirty job faster than rakes and without the noise and fumes of gas-powered blowers. Most also vacuum, shred and bag dry leaves for mulch or compost. Our testers put four units to the test. Here's what they had to say.

—BAI HASLICK

#### WORX TRIVAC WG500

Price: \$85

**Highlight:** Converts from blower to vacuum with flip of a lever



**Tester:** Barbara Small  
Resident in Mich.  
**Skill level:** None  
**Average Difer:** ("I actually use leaf blowers on the lawn.")

**My two cents:** It had no problems grinding up pine cones, but I found the bag awkward to use."

**Test stats:** 6 pounds, blower speed: 225 mph in 2nd ch; vacuum: 250 cfm; reinforced nylon impeller blade: 12 mph; 30 lbs bag; 30 decibels (dB) [www.pexsupply.com](http://www.pexsupply.com)



The best single engine vacuuming unit.

[www.pexsupply.com](http://www.pexsupply.com)

#### TROY-BILT TB-125QS

Price: \$80

**Highlight:** Comes with a wheelbarrow for transport to vacuum patios, decks and walkways.



**Tester:** David Winkler  
Resident in Ga.  
**Skill level:** None  
**Average Difer:** ("I love vacuuming and I'm building a stacked-deck patio.")

**My two cents:** "Even on low power, I pushed up wet leaves on the deck that I had to shovel away with a shovel when I was done."

**Test stats:** 14 pounds, blower speed: 187 mph at 430 cfm; vacuum: 420 cfm; 21 mph; reinforced nylon impeller blade: 12 mph; 30 lbs bag; 30 dB [www.pexsupply.com](http://www.pexsupply.com)

Note: All of speeds and volumes were measured inside a vacuum chamber.

**WANT TO BE A TESTER?** Let us know which tool you'd like to test and the project you'd use it on by e-mailing us at [tooltest@thisoldhouse.com](mailto:tooltest@thisoldhouse.com)



#### STIHL BGE 71

Price: \$150 for blower; \$40 for vacuum kit

**Highlight:** The lightweight blower is ideal for cleaning gutters.



**Tester:** Susan Hanks  
Resident in Calif.  
**Skill level:** Skilled Difer ("I regularly prune seven inch trees and more than 80 rose bushes.")

**My two cents:** "The best feature is the two speed switch, which allowed me to reduce the air blast when rounding up piles of leaves or cleaning gutters."

**Test stats:** 6 pounds, blower: 148 mph with 204 cfm; vacuum: 260 cfm; polycarbonate impeller blade: 9.2 mph; sound level: 64 dB [www.pexsupply.com](http://www.pexsupply.com)

#### TORO ULTRA BLOWER VAC 51599

Price: \$90

**Highlight:** Ultra lightweight impeller fan.



**Tester:** Adam Tarr  
Resident in Mo.  
**Skill level:** Average Difer ("I mow the lawn and maintain a small vegetable garden.")

**My two cents:** "I've never clogged but when it did the clog was easy to dislodge."

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# save this old house

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**The history:** The old Grubb House must be feeling mighty lonely. Once part of a prosperous neighborhood known as Intersect Grove, this Second Empire stood among the finest addresses in town back when it was built in the late 1800s. But those neighboring homes are all gone now, disassembled to make way for strip malls, car dealerships, and other commercial enterprises along its long and redneck road. Saving this house standing at by its lone light would be quite a sad job. Ernest Grubb, the country doctor who lived here from 1900 to 1910 and whose widow, Cora, remained in the house until the 1960s. The current owner is offering it to anyone who'll move it to a more tranquil plot and restore it as a suitable home.

**Who were they?** The five-bedroom house packs plenty of detail. Many of its large two-over-two windows and painted doors are intact, as are the trim, back staircase, sleeping porch, and beadboard wainscoting in Dr. Grubb's back office.

**What it needs:** The solid, brickwork frame house should have no problem withstanding a move. The exterior is relatively new, but since the house is relocated, it needs new HVAC system and plumbing. There are well-preserved gutters and flashing replacements for those boarded-up windows. Once that's done, the old place will blend peacefully into its new surroundings, far from the cacophony of commerce. —GUY LAWRENCE



**F. The parties of mixed high society** suggests this Second Empire home was originally built to the Colonial Revival or Greek Revival style. The mantel and end wall height front porch were added later. 2. A back window reveals the interior's woodwork. 3. A window bay adds light to the second floor hall. 4. The house has just one fully built-in kitchen and a small side hall that is part of the deck.

**Cost, a huck?** The purchase of an old house that should be moved and a sale to the Fort Royal, 25 West 10th Street, New York, NY 10001. For more information, visit [www.saveoldhouses.com](http://www.saveoldhouses.com).

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